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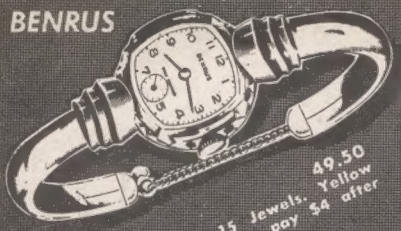

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Adventure
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Vol. 118, No. 2 for December, 1947 Best of New Stories

NOVELETTES

Seafaring Lancer.....JOHN SCOTT DOUGLAS 28

When the great Barney Nordall, harpooner-owner of the *Dauntless*, was killed his obit received scant attention, but George North was unwilling to accept the story that it was an accident. Seemingly as imperishable as the sea itself and hardy as the Vikings he resembled, Nordall had been attacked by a swordfish and bled to death before help arrived. Was it mere carelessness on the part of the crew, North wanted to know, or coldblooded murder?

Red Ivory.....ALEXANDER WALLACE 64

Senhor Estevao Lorente, senior agent at Mluluka for the powerful *Companhia do Nyassa*, was an embittered man. As he told Eric Marshall, just arrived at the post with instructions to check the accounts of the gaunt, hair-trigger-tempered Portuguese, "If I had my youth again, I'd sooner go to hell than to Mluluka!" And after observing Lorente's bloody imbroglio with the Kosango chief, Itoko, over a fortune in coffee-brown tusks of ivory, Marshall felt sure the agent would have his chance to weigh the relative merits of the two habitations before many more days under the steaming African sun.

SHORT STORIES

Shipment Seventeen.....ROBINSON MacLEAN 48

In our business—which is smuggling human contraband out of Europe—it's either U.S.A. or R.I.P. And here was Shipment #17 all loused up from the start. In the first place, we didn't even know this Pole we were after, except for a fake name on a phony passport, which made him the proverbial needle in the haystack of post-war Cairo. Second, the Russians knew damn near everything we did. And finally, if #17 didn't go through there wouldn't be any 18, 19 or 20. All of which added up to the possibility of some top-flight scientists, who had gone underground during the war, going underground forever now that "peace" was here.

The Ruination of Restless Solomon.....FRED GIPSON 58

When that itchy-footed drifter, Restless Solomon, claimed he was going to settle down and work the old Sub Felder place, nobody in Wolf Branch had any faith in his sticking to it. But Restless fooled 'em. He toiled and slaved all winter and spring on that farm till the night I burned his cabin down and he was forced to pull up stakes and move on again. And I've never yet been able to figure out why Restless wasn't sore at me at all!

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BE OUT ON DECEMBER 10TH ◆ ◆ ◆

The Head of the Bearded One.....B. L. McGANN 82

They'd have made such a lovely couple: J. Livingstone Derwent III and Kuparuk Memoranna Steve Illavarnik Olitok Joe Noashak Pammigbluk Nellie Seattle Jim Palaiyak, the tattooed belle of Coronation Gulf. But—alas! —it was not to be. For J. Livingstone might be the youngest, smartest meteorologist north of the Arctic Circle and the cream of Society back home in the States, but he was guilty of one glaring social error that made him forever ineligible for the hand of the fair Eskimo maiden, Kuparuk Memoranna Steve Illa— But isn't this where we came in?

Of Treachery and Tradesmen.....P. B. BUCKLEY 126

In which Luigi Caradosso, sometime Captain of the Guard, taking the siege of Valenza for his text, discourses to his patron Duke Pietro IV on the hellish machinations of burghers, syndics, clerks and like pious pen-pushers who conspire to mulct honest mercenaries and gentlemen of the sword, whose unfailing loyalty (to the highest bidder, of course) is so well-known as to need no further elucidation.

SERIALS

Restricted! (1st of 4 parts).....GEORGES SURDEZ 6

1947—the war was over—and peace was supposed to have come to the Jura mountain region of France as well as to the rest of the continent so recently overrun by Nazi hordes in *feldgrau*. But to Bruce Kerrigan, rusticating in the Swiss border countryside near Forlagne, evidence to the contrary was inescapable, incredible though it might seem. Had he not heard the all-too-familiar death rattle of a German automatic carbine in the night? Was there not a wounded boy lying in the attic room of the Matignon farmhouse? Where could the bloody trail lead, if not to the barb-wire-barricaded, mystery-shrouded sanatorium, perched there on its mountaintop and known locally as "The End of the World"?

Prairie Paddles (Conclusion).....CARL D. LANE 90

Saved by a pinch of gunpowder from a quick and certain finish at the hands of Tiny Beldon's hired killers, Haines Butler lives to carry the fight to the gang's last hideout at Medicine Arrow—where the lawless forces that have spread death and terror along the banks of the Big Muddy make their last desperate stand against the men who have vowed to open up the mighty waterway to a new era of peace and progress.

THE FACT STORY

The Long Death.....GEORGE C. APPELL 120

War is woman's work in China—for it is a woman's life there, not a man's. On the surface man rules, but it is woman, guilefully submissive, who carries the load and shapes their common existence. In China one woman equals ten men. So runs the proverb. But twenty to one might be closer to the truth. ... Take, for instance, the time a Mongolian nurse swam the swollen Yangtze while the entire 1st Battalion held its breath—knowing there wasn't a man among them who could have bucked the current in her wake.

VERSE

On the Santa Fe Trail.....LOWE W. WREN 27

Contented men—the stay-at-homes—earn markers when they die;
No tombstone stands above our trail except the open sky.

Love Letter of a Lumberjack.....HAROLD WILLARD GLEASON 63

Three hosses has the colic; two is lame.
Black flies is hell. Here's hopin' you're the same—

DEPARTMENTS

The Camp-Fire.....Where readers, writers and adventurers meet 133
Ask Adventure.....Information you can't get elsewhere 138
Ask Adventure Experts.....The men who furnish it 141
Lost Trails.....Where old paths cross 143
The Trail Ahead.....News of next month's issue 137

Cover painted for Adventure *by Peter Stevens*

Kenneth S. White, Editor

RESTRICTED!

ILLUSTRATED BY
EARL EUGENE MAYAN

By GEORGES SURDEZ

THERE are Boches hiding in the woods and they killed my friend Albert—

Bruce Kerrigan awoke to an almost intolerable sense of anxiety. The words rang in his ears. Within two seconds, he shrugged, realized that he merely had carried into his first conscious moments the perturbation of a series of bad dreams, dreams of endless falls through space, of wild pursuits and shooting in foggy darkness, of dim, fumbling killings.

"They killed my friend Albert," he repeated aloud, then laughed as he got out of the immense, old-fashioned bed. "They killed Albert! He's a nice kid, but I am a sap."

As soon as his feet struck the cool tiles he felt better. He pushed the wooden shutters back, breathed in the thin, sharp mountain air. He looked out upon a magnificent panorama, long green slopes broken by patches of orchards, crisscrossed by fences of wood and stone, lifting into the bright eastern sky towards the darker green crowns of firs on the ridges. In the distance, he could see moving light-hued blotches, which were cows at pasture,

Then a big electric torch went on, and they spotted me. One of them aimed a gun at me and told me to come down.

he could even discern at times the remote, silvery tinkling of their bells. Nothing could have seemed more peaceful than this isolated section of the French Jura.

Boches hiding in the woods—

He poured water from the big stoneware ewer into the basin, splashed his face and neck. It was some minutes after eight, which must seem late in this region in the summer. Three or four hours ago he had been vaguely aware of the many sounds as the farm came to life, the squeals of the pump, the trampling and squashing of wooden shoes in the yard, the thumping and neighing of horses, the multiplied and confused clatters and clangs from barns and kitchen.

"The shooting happened before that—it was still quite dark—" Bruce mused. Then he grinned with irritation. "I dreamed it. Better not talk to them about shooting, they're liable to think I am a nut. I don't think the big guy likes me around too much. Can't blame them, at that. The fact is, Alain never asked me to play big brother to Nicolas, who has more relatives than he knows what to do with. Probably, it never even occurred to him. But what the hell, I had to write something to the kid . . ."

IT WAS true enough that Alain Matignon and he had been as close as brothers for some months. They had shared quarters in England, had been part of an OSS team. Together, they had pulled off one successful mission, parachuted into Occupied Brittany to establish contact with the partisans.

The second mission had dropped them somewhere in Burgundy. The end had come very simply. They had been marching across country, behind a local guide, through the morning mists. An automatic weapon had rattled somewhere, a bullet had killed Alain, another had smashed into Bruce's thigh. The Germans had been tipped off; there are traitors everywhere.

Bruce did not like to think of the next few days. He had been interviewed by the Gestapo. For some reason, which he did not know and probably never would know, he had not been shot. There had been times, at first in a filthy prison in France, then in a camp in Germany, when he had regretted surviving. When he had been freed, after seven months, he had looked forty-five instead of twenty-seven, weighed one hundred and twenty-six pounds instead of close to one hundred and eighty.

He had been shipped home to the States to recover. During his convalescence, he had written to Jeanne Matignon, Alain's mother, as he had promised him he would do if and when. As his friend had occasionally mentioned a little brother, Nicolas known as Colas, seven years old, he had added a few lines for him. To his surprise the boy had answered himself—Bruce had overlooked the obvious, that the years passed for all everywhere, and that the child had become a lad.

He had complied with requests for badges, stamps, magazines, had kept up the exchange of letters. When, officially recovered, Bruce had reached France again, in the employ of an American commercial firm, the boy had started to coax him to come out and visit with his folks.

Toward the end of July 1946, two things had happened, one of which seemed the providential solution of the other. Bruce had recovered physically, he looked his age and had one hundred and seventy-five pounds on his six-foot frame. But his nerves, which had stood up during the years of travel, action, danger and prison, gave him trouble. He had nightmares and his stomach was uneasy. The doctors informed him that his case was not unusual, a delayed reaction perhaps, certainly the result of living a bit too feverishly in Paris. A country diet, six weeks of absolute quiet would straighten him out.

"I'd suggest Switzerland," the doctor who played destiny told him, "but the tourists are swarming again, you'd be tempted by night-life, rich foods, dancing, cocktails. I'd advise some lonely spot, in the Dauphiné or the Jura."

Reaching his room, Bruce had found a letter from fourteen-year-old Nicolas Matignon. He was reminded of his rash promise to substitute for Alain in case of need. He, Nicolas, was faced by a serious problem which he could not confide to his older brother, Prosper, because he would find no sympathy, nor to his mother, who would be alarmed. The letter was far from clear, partly because the lad tried for secrecy, partly because he was

excited, but he referred to Boches hiding somewhere in the woods, to the kidnapping and probable murder of a friend named Albert, to crooked politics and venal police.

The address was Matignon Farm, via Forlagne, Jura. Bruce had written Madame Matignon, without mentioning her son's letter. He explained his situation, his need for a rest in the country. Naturally, he insisted on a price being quoted. And concluded that Alain had talked about his home so often that he had always been anxious to see it.

She replied that he would be very welcome to share their simple existence, that after consulting with her oldest boy, who managed the farm, she would accept a small sum per week for every week after the first one. During that first week, he would be their guest, and they only stipulated a price to be certain he would come and not fear to embarrass them.

Bruce had started from Paris in an express train to the east, transferred to a toy-like railway, a regional, to climb into the hills, changed from that to a dilapidated bus which had dumped him at twilight before the inn at Forlagne. There, a battered old car had picked him up and taken him to the farm.

The farm was much more impressive than Bruce had imagined—several buildings, two of them modern barns, and the main house was a sizable structure, stone covered with red tiles. On thinking it over, Bruce realized he should have guessed Alain's people were rather prosperous, as he had been educated in Lyons and Paris. Madame Matignon embraced him and wept—he had known her son. She was a big, pink-faced woman in the middle fifties, with graying hair. Bruce shook hands with dozens of people, it seemed to him, some Matignons, brothers, sisters, children of assorted ages, others farmhands, maids, herders.

PROSPER MATIGNON turned out to be a sort of blondish human buffalo, very big and wide, deep-set little blue eyes in a broad placid, clean-shaven face. He limped, and Bruce remembered that Alain had told him a game leg had kept him out of the Army. Nicolas, who was a good twenty years younger, resembled Alain very much, tall for his age, lean of limb, deep of chest, with the same mop of fair hair, determined chin and resolute glance. He appeared much steadier than Bruce had expected from his rather incoherent letter.

"We'll talk later," he had whispered at the first chance. "I'll know a lot more by tomorrow."

There were a score of persons at the table for supper, in the old-fashioned kitchen, for the hands and maids ate with the owners. All had known Alain, all knew Bruce had been his friend, and they listened with many shakes of the head, pursing of lips, sighs, as Bruce replied to the mother's questions: How tall had Alain grown before—before? Bruce must undertsand that he had not been fully grown when he had left to enlist, in 1939. She had heard that he had been to America. For special training? Where? How long? She had been informed he had been awarded the Bronze Star—was that the American equivalent of the War Cross? Had he still liked veal knuckles so much?

Bruce answered as best he could. He experienced a sense of unreality. He looked at the huge fireplace, at the rows of shining pots and pans, at the brass ornaments on the mantel, and he recalled that Alain had described them. How much men talked of home in loneliness and danger! If Alain had survived instead of Bruce, and had visited the Kerrigans, he would probably have recognized the ship models given his father by old sea captains!

Nicolas interrupted with questions about the adventures and combats Bruce and Alain had gone through side by side: "You were about the same age, weren't you, Monsieur Kerrigan? All right, I'll say Bruce. He'd have been a captain by now, like you, if he—"

Prosper struck his palm on the table.

"Colas! Let your mother talk, can't you? You can talk all you want later. And don't get your head so stuffed with war yarns that you neglect the chores." Prosper swung his head to face Bruce, in a peculiar, heavy, bovine gesture. "Don't pay any attention to him, he's been half-crazy since his pal ran away."

"He didn't run away." Nicolas grew excited at once. "If he ran away, why don't the police find him?"

"Why? Because he's not worth finding, that's why. I told the police I didn't want him back here." Prosper helped himself to another portion of boiled meat and vegetables. He explained to Bruce as he chewed: "Boy from the orphanage we took in for five, six years. He and Colas were thick as thieves. He ran away some weeks ago.

"Getting too big for his boots, you know, and I had to punish him for not working." He shook his head and smiled slowly. "Oh, no, you misunderstand me. I never struck him. But I reminded him of his position here, that he was supposed to be earning his keep, and he got offended."

"He didn't run away," Nicolas insisted. He looked over at Bruce and the American remembered several mentions of a friend named Albert, who was missing. "The cops are a pack of tramps, they wouldn't look for him in the right place."

"I'd be careful about saying more," Prosper warned, looking around the table. "Where there are ears, there are tongues. If the people up there knew you were gossiping, they'd have you shut up quickly enough, not to speak of turning down our products at the market."

"There you go, for a few pounds of butter, a few dozen fresh eggs, you—"

"Only fools speak lightly of what makes their living," Prosper proclaimed. "If you go to good schools and make something of yourself in life, it will have taken a good many pounds of butter and a lot of dozens of eggs to pay for it."

"Who are 'the people up there'?" Bruce asked, to shift the conversation. Prosper was growing angry at the boy's belligerence.

"The Sana," Prosper said. Then he shrugged and explained: "A sanatorium. Around here, we call it The End of the World, because the road ends there. It's been there since 1908, as a sanatorium, that is. The main building, the Château, was built in 1732, and you can still see the ruins of an older castle which was there long before—since who knows when, maybe a thousand years." He gestured widely. "Folks around here have always been sore because the management won't allow their people to mix in the neighborhood. It's a rule they have, it's their own business, and maybe it's a good rule."

"They took in Boche aviators," Nicolas shouted.

"Sure. And your own mother had to give food and drink to Boche patrols right in this kitchen. They were here and what could anybody do about them?"

"The Director was a collaborator—"

"Again, I say you talk too much." Prosper sliced a piece of bread with great care. "You know he was investigated and cleared last year. And he is a naturalized Frenchman, he served in our Army during the Great War, didn't he? Captain in the Medical Corps and decorated."

CHAPTER II

A SHOT IN THE NIGHT

THE farm people retired very early. Bruce sat for an hour or so with Madame Matignon, speaking about Alain, looking at the photographs she brought out. Alain as a baby, Alain at his first communion, Alain in his Lycée uniform and peaked cap. And, obstinately, Bruce's mind turned back to the misty morning, and the bleeding head in the grass.

"He was brave?"

"Nobody braver, Mother Jeanne," Bruce said, using the name everyone used at the farm. "And cheerful."

Prosper sat by, sucking at his pipe, saying very little, watching Bruce. At nine, he sent Nicolas off to bed with a curt reminder that there would be chores in the morning. With the boy gone, he grew a little more talkative.

"Yes, we had partisans up here. I went out myself once or twice, in the beginning, not because I felt like it, I'm no hero, but to do like the rest. Then they told me not to come along, because I am big and I limp and even at night I could be spotted. Nothing much doing on this mountain, though. The Boches used to send aviators to the Sana for rest, and some of the guys talked once in a while of coming up and bumping off the lot. See, a lot of them were specially trained for night flying—interceptors, they were—the British bombers used to fly over, on their way to Lyons and Italy. Killing those flyers would have done some good.

"But there was a big hitch. Once you leave the village of Forlagne, the road

goes only to the Sana. Cross Forlagne and you're in a pocket on this mountain. The Boches weren't so dumb they didn't know that. One of the first things they did was to call all the notables to the village hall—I'm a member of the Council, you know—and they showed us on maps just how they could concentrate their troops from various spots at the first alert—just like pulling the strings of a reticule.

"Then they drew up a list of hostages—as owner of this farm, I was fourth on it—who would be shot at once if anything were tried."

"Did anything ever happen?"

"Two attempts. A shot fired at a car, a patrol guy wounded."

"Shoot anybody?"

"Yes. Three the first time, five the next." Prosper laughed suddenly. "And I was fourth, you're thinking! But by that time, they knew I wasn't in on any funny stuff. They had their informers, you know. And they wanted to keep this farm going right."

THE long talk about Alain, Prosper's stories of the resistance—there had been much activity along the railway, some kilometers away—had stirred old memories which, Bruce thought, explained the sequence of nightmares.

As he ran a comb through his hair, he thought over the situation. Mother Jeanne liked him well enough, but before long he would have told her all he knew about her dead son and he would be a reminder that some had been fortunate enough to survive. He felt that Prosper did not like him much, and did not want him hanging around long.

Well, he could write to his friends in Paris to send him a telegram urging his return. He would talk to the boy, Nicolas, and find out what there was in his story. Last night, Mother Jeanne had pointed out to him on a snapshot the missing Albert. Bruce had been surprised—although only three years older than Nicolas, still under eighteen, the fellow looked like a grown man.

"He was a foundling," Mother Jeanne explained, "and I always thought there was a mixup in his age. Why, he needed a shave at thirteen—"

Albert Legrain had not been merely large—even on the small photograph it could be seen that he was very good-looking, and not at all in a rustic fashion. He wore the peasant blouse like a velvet doublet, his features were regular, almost perfect, his hair thick, wavy. In the group of farm people he stood out like a thoroughbred horse among plow beasts.

"Handsome guy," Bruce commented.

"And did he know it," the old woman said. She sighed and gestured with her hands. "I'm glad he left. You see, Colas admired him too much, imitated him. It was all right about some things, but not everything." She added, with country candor, "My Françoise—she is nineteen—we had to send her to live with her oldest sister Henriette—her husband has a hardware store in town—the boy was looking at her—"

"And she was looking, too," Prosper commented gravely, "which was more serious." He shook his head as he met Bruce's glance. "No, he hasn't shown up there. I wrote to my brother-in-law to keep an eye open."

Bruce checked himself in the mirror, ran his fingers over his chin. He would do for a few hours. He walked along an inner passage to the kitchen. A maid was busy at the big stove, but Mother Jeanne was seated at the table, facing two gendarmes. There was a bottle of wine and several glasses before them.

"Good morning, Bruce," said Mother Jeanne. "Toinette will give you breakfast. This is Corporal Flutet and Gendarme Macard."

Bruce acknowledged the introduction with a smile, sat down before an enormous bowl of café au lait, plates of bread, butter, pots of jam and jellies.

"Is this the gentleman in question?" Corporal Fluete asked courteously. He was forty-ish, plump, bald, wore a thin black mustache.

"We haven't got thirty-six guests, Corporal."

"You have your papers, Monsieur?"

"Right here, Corporal." Bruce produced a wallet, flipped it open and pushed it across the table. He was not annoyed, he knew gendarmes of old.

"Kerrigan, Bruce, Charles, American." The corporal moved his lips as he read. "You're in order, all in order. Sorry, but we have our duty to do."

"Saves me the trip to the mayor's office, Corporal. No harm done."

"Well, you see," the gendarme resumed apologetically, "they had a prowler at the Sana last night. They phoned in to the Gendarmerie, so naturally we have to check all outsiders more carefully than usual." He broke into a laugh, handed back the papers. "But I guess you're in the clear, *mon capitaine.*"

"Bah," Bruce said, smiling, "you never can tell."

"Right you are, Monsieur. Everybody present and accounted for, Mother Jeanne? Good. Except Albert, of course." He laughed again, loudly. "If he'd been here, we'd have pinched him sure."

"Why? Was anything stolen?"

"They think so. They're checking. The guards—they have their own guards, you know, being a registered Sana—traced the guy to the outside. They fired at him and they think maybe they hit him."

"Used a German automatic carbine," Bruce declared.

"A *mitraillette,* yes—" the corporal admitted. "How did you know?"

"Heard it—woke me up, thought I was dreaming."

"How did you know what gun was used?"

"Heard enough of those damn things, you know."

"Ah, yes—you were in the army." The policeman reflected. "You speak French very well."

"Should. Brought up in France."

"I see. Father in the diplomatic service?"

"No Represented an American steamship company. Bordeaux, Le Harve—"

"Still living?"

"My father? Yes."

"In France?"

"In America. Why?"

"Nothing, curiosity. Beg your pardon. You say you are here on a vacation, for rest? Of course, or course." The corporal rose, shook hands with everybody, including the maid, led his man outside. Bruce saw them climb on bicycles and pedal away.

"Sorry to have delayed things," Bruce commented, finishing breakfast. "Overslept. Didn't mean to—"

"That happens to people when they first come here, they say it's because of the altitude that tires them." Mother Jeanne paused. "Corporal Flutet asked me a lot of questions about you. Told me he'd been ordered to find out. I explained how it was, that you knew my boy. You see, very few outsiders come here."

"There would be many if people knew how lovely it is."

"Well, there's only one place for a big hotel and that's taken by the sanatorium. I think the owners don't want competition." Mother Jeanne looked to see that the maid was beyond hearing, spoke in a lower voice. "I'm very worried. Nicolas didn't get up this morning. He says he is sick and he doesn't look well. I had to argue with Prosper to leave him be—Prosper is rough at times. I wonder if you would go and talk to Colas."

"Me?" Bruce smiled. "Gladly, but—"

"Oh, he admires you so much, so much. He was always talking about your coming here to see him. And you've arrived. He is angry at Prosper because of what happened to Albert, but still, it is wrong for him to act so lazy."

Bruce lighted a cigarette. He felt splendid.

"Where do I find him?"

"Upstairs, just above your room."

BRUCE knocked on the door and entered the room. The wooden shutters were drawn, the room was almost dark. A familiar yet undefinable odor drifted about, warm and not too pleasant.

"Still in bed?"

The boy mumbled a few words. Bruce pushed the blinds open, the light flooded in. Brass handles and knobs glittered on the massive dark walnut furniture. The bed was another enormous affair, long enough for a giant and wide enough for two. Nicolas was resting with his head propped up by the bolster, his eyes staring.

"Not feeling so well, Colas?"

"Sick, yes, sick."

"Where? What's the matter?"

"Don't know, don't know—"

Bruce took a closer look at him, noticed the white lips, the pinching of the nostrils. He had seen the faces of wounded men often enough. He gently drew back the covers, saw bloody linen.

"Where, Colas? Belly or leg?"

"Where, Colas?" Bruce asked. "Belly or leg?"

"Leg, I think."

"When did it happen, I mean how long have you been bleeding?" The boy did not answer clearly. But Bruce did not need an answer. At two-thirty or three o'clock, when he had heard the shooting. "It happened up there, at the Sana?" Unconsciously, he used the local term. "Never mind that, old man, take it easy, we'll get the doctor—"

"No, no—no doctor. Got to report, doctor got to report—don't tell Prosper—don't tell Prosper—"

"Bah, don't worry, old man, he won't say any thing when you're hurt."

"You—don't know him—he—turn me over to the cops—"

"Nonsense— Oh, all right, all right." Bruce pressed the boy back gently. "But you understand, we must have a doctor.

I don't want to move that padding you made unless there's a doctor—"

"Not so bad—walked—six kilometers—after." Nicolas gasped, smiled faintly. "Climbed back—don't tell Prosper—"

"I won't. Be back in a second." Bruce refrained from handing the wounded boy a cigarette. He had seen many young men wounded, some almost as young as this one, sixteen, seventeen. Why am I thinking of nutty things like that, he wondered as he went downstairs, and beckoned to Mother Jeanne to come into the corridor. "Look, Mother Jeanne, you must be calm, strong—"

She looked at him with all the calm he could have desired.

"Colas is hurt? I was afraid of that, he didn't look right. But—Prosper is always saying I coddle him, baby him. I should have listened to my heart." She started toward the stairs, and monologued as she went: "Don't worry—I gave birth to seven children, I've taken care of them all when they were sick—I nursed my husband for four months before he died, so I am not the kind that faints." She swept into Nicolas' room, rested her hand on the boy's brow. "So you sneak out nights and get yourself shot, do you? Then you lie to me about what's the matter with you, do you?"

"Prosper will be angry—because you came in my room—"

"I can get angry, too. This happened at the Sana?"

"Outside—near the quarry."

"Now, tell me the truth—did you steal anything?"

"Never even got into a house."

"They reported a robbery, they did." She caught Bruce's gesture that she should hurry. "He's had sense enough to stop the bleeding—an hour or so won't make much difference unless it starts again. Takes a lot to kill a Matignon." She probably remembered then that he had seen a Mattignon die, shook her head. "Unless it's done outright. Now, we've got things to think about—this boy has his life ahead of him, and I don't want him held for theft. Or even suspected—"

She threw back the covers, probed at the mass of bandages improvised from towels and a torn sheet. "Hurts here? Here?" She straightened her back with a sort of neighing giggle of relief. "You can give him a drink—his belly's all right. I'll send for somebody—"

"Don't tell Prosper," Nicolas begged.

"I won't—he won't be back till supper—they're cutting on the upper fields and I'm sending their lunch."

"He'd turn me in like a shot, mother."

"Don't I know it, Colas?" She beckoned to Bruce to follow her, and spoke to him downstairs. "If you stayed, he'd talk and hurt himself. Now, my good Monsieur, you'll think I am a queer kind of a mother, but I know what I am doing—I know all about my children, the good and the bad. Did my Alain ever talk to you about Prosper?"

"Not much, except that he ran the farm and had a good business head."

"Well, Prosper takes after his Matignon grandfather. Toinette!" When the maid appeared, drying her hands on her apron, she said, "Get me Bejart, and at the gallop." She motioned for Bruce to sit at the big table in the kitchen, poured two big cups of coffee. "He'll know what to do. I'm sorry this happens when you're here. And as long as you're in on the family secrets, young man, I would not have asked you for board, except that Prosper insisted on it. He has two children of his own, you saw them—little boys—well, he'd sell them for sausage meat if he got the right offer. One of my girls is like that, too, Jeanne. Alain and Henriette are like their father—he was, Alain was. Françoise, you can't tell yet, she's giddy and thinks too much of men to think much of money. Nicolas is about right. Not a miser, but a good head—ah, here you are, Bejart! You've met Monsieur Bruce?"

"Shook hands last night," Bejart said.

He was an odd-looking man in many ways. For instance, it was hard to give his age. He might have been fifty or seventy, according to whether one judged by his tall, rangy body and powerful hands or by his seamed, chestnut-colored face in the mass of white and gray hair and whiskers. He squinted through lowered lids, yet the glance flashed through alert, cold as steel.

"Leave us alone, Toinette," Mother Jeanne told the maid. She sat down before Bejart who had poured himself a tumbler of wine. "No use beating about the bush, Bejart. My youngest got himself shot up there, and they say something was stolen. The cops were here this morning

"I can do it, but it's risky, Mother Jeanne," Bejart said.

asking questions. He's lost blood, but it doesn't look very bad. Think you can take care of it?"

"I can, but it's risky, Mother Jeanne." Bejart lifted his bony shoulders. "You know, they can't bother me much for making amulets and throwing spells. But I am no school doctor, I have no certificates, and a gunshot wound—well, I'd cure him, all right, you know that. But what worries me is not me, it's you. If Prosper found out he could make something of the fact that you didn't send for a regular doctor for your kid, and get you to sign papers turning all you've left over to him—"

Bejart hesitated and the woman smiled. "Bruce was Alain's friend, you can talk."

"Oh, as long as you talked before him, I didn't worry. But I was thinking. Here's what I'll do. I'll get Doctor Sezille, it's his visiting day at Forlagne and when he knows it's your kid, he'll come right up."

"But, Bejart, doesn't he have to make a report?"

"Look here, he owes me a lot of favors and he did so much work during the Occupation that he didn't report he won't mind this. Also, we can tell him a story to cover himself with. One thing's sure, he'll be glad to put something over on the Sana. He hates them."

"Why?" Bruce wondered.

"Had a row with them, last summer. When a lot of guys started coming home from prison camps in Germany, some of them were in pretty poor shape. He asked for the Sana to take twenty or so in, because they have the installation, and it was no more than had been done for flyers, Boche flyers. The Director turned him down flat, said he ran a private establishment. Doctor Sezille then tried through the authorities, and he got the cold shoulder. The Sana's protected and before our sick could be taken in you had to show emergency and public weal and such stuff, and get credit to pay the Sana—so there it is, Boche aviators in good health could go there to play tennis and rest, our guys, half-croaked by starvation and exposure in their lousy camps can't get in."

"The Germans had a good argument," Bruce said. "Force."

"We could use a little of that, too, in the right places."

Bejart finished his wine and cycled down to the village.

CHAPTER III

PROFESSIONAL ETHICS

DOCTOR Sezille arrived about an hour and a half later. He drove a small American car of 1935 vintage. But he was different from the picture Bruce had created of him—no pointed beard, no gold-rimmed glasses. He was a short, dapper, round man in the late thirties, with small features, a pouty mouth, and thick sleek black hair parted on the right. He wore an old suit, of good if ancient style, gray, double-breasted.

"When did your boy first complain of pains in his side?" he said aloud to Mother Jeanne as he crossed the kitchen. "Two, three days ago, I suppose, but no, you won't call the doctor—"

"That's for the maid's benefit," Bejart told Bruce as they waited outside Colas'

"Nothing serious," said Doctor Sezille. "Some loss of blood, quite a loss in fact."

room. Mother Jeanne went down several times, for hot water, for linen.

Later, the three men, Bruce, Bejart and the doctor, gathered in Bruce's room where the physician scrubbed his hands. He had accepted a cigarette from the American, and the tip moved as he spoke. "Nothing serious. Some loss of blood, quite a loss in fact. No bone fracture." He tapped Bruce on the shoulder. "Lift your right leg as if you were running—that's it —the missile went in here," he touched the underside of Bruce's thigh, "and came out here—ten centimeters from the knee. Small caliber. Officially, it's a bad sprain from a fall."

"It's pretty rough to shoot at a kid," Bruce said.

"Well, to start with, they didn't know he was a kid, at first. And he was on private property. The guards are licensed to carry guns. You see, some of the patients up there are—well, mental cases. And they took care, when the boy escaped, to get in their story first about theft. I'll warrant that if they needed to, if we filed a complaint, they'd discover some valuables to be missing. Scruples do not choke the people up there. My dear fellow, if you think you have a monopoly of crooked politicians, grafting officials and gangsters in America, you are mistaken. That establishment was as honest as such places ordinarily are until 1922 or 3—all things run for profit have some dishonest features, of course. But since, ah, since!

"And you can't say anything, you can't touch them. Suppose I made an official report—who am I? A country doctor, not over-prosperous, jealous of a successful confrère. Soured because I am never called into consultation. Sore because the prices are too high for my clients."

"I'd like to see the place," Bruce said. "The view must be beautiful."

"Oh, quite." The doctor smiled faintly. "One can see the Alps on a clear day. But you won't be permitted to enter. Even on an official call, I was escorted from gate to office by a chap with a pistol on his hip. Well, perhaps the Director has a good memory. Back in 1942, I approached him on a delicate matter—hinted he had an ideal place for a certain sort of patients—the aviators of one nationality there officially would cover aviators of another there unofficially. He informed me that the Germans kept a section of infantry on his premises.

"By an odd coincidence, I was arrested the next day, taken to the Departmental Capital, questioned at length, held as hostage for a term of six months. People become a bit bored nowadays about stories of torture, but I do have an interesting set of scars."

"I was questioned by the Gestapo myself," Bruce said.

They exchanged smiles.

"Of course," Sezille resumed, "we both realize by now that there was a war on, that they had their duty to do. If we met any of them again, we would compare notes in a friendly way."

"Oh, absolutely, Doctor. We hold no grudge."

Both laughed.

"So you understand that I like the Director very much—the authorities cleared him, assured me that he never went beyond his quality as a medical man apart from the fighting, a healer, not a killer. In

fact, his good relations with the Occupants were of great help to many, many people."

"That has a familiar sound," Bruce said. "And the puzzling thing is that it is true on occasions." The doctor had closed his bag and was about to leave. "Do you think, Doctor, that we should let that shooting of a boy go just like that? Surely, the local police could not take that charge of stealing seriously."

"Lord knows what a gendarme will take seriously," Sezille replied. "They would question the boy, and in the country that starts rumors which may linger for years. Mother Jeanne is perfectly right to hide it." The doctor stopped short at the door, came back into the room. "By the way, we know Colas didn't go up there to steal. But what was he doing there in the middle of the night?"

"Looking for Albert, probably," Bruce replied.

"The orphanage fellow? What about him?"

"He's missing," Bejart said. "Didn't you hear?"

"I seldom get up around here," Sezille retorted with some impatience. "Too healthy from a physican's point of view, takes a flail, a mowing machine or—a bullet to hurt your people. So I didn't hear, no. How long has he been gone?"

"About a month." Bejart snickered. "People kept telling him he should be in the movies, so he probably is trying it."

"Conceited and fatuous enough for it," the doctor commented. "But why was Colas looking for him up there? Does he think he might have gone to the Sana and—"

"He may have a point," Bruce remarked. "Look what happened to him. They're pretty free with their guns up there."

"He's suffering from shock, and he's been badly scared—"

"Here's a letter from him." Bruce rose from his bag. "In view of what has happened, it's interesting. It's between ourselves, eh, Bejart? I haven't told his folks."

The doctor read the letter.

"Look here, Kerrigan, I'm interested. You possibly understand why? I see you do. I'm not due in Forlagne again until next week this day. The mother is competent to change the dressing. He'll sleep until four or five o'clock today. Don't question him yet, but if he wants to talk, listen. If anything develops, there's the telephone at the Post Office at Forlagne. Don't discuss anything, merely make an appointment. In an emergency, I can motor up here, or we can meet at Forlagne, or you can come to see me at Aurebois—it's only forty-five kilometers, there's a bus—we'll find some good reason."

"I'm under treatment, so the reason's all found, Doctor."

"You look rugged enough—ah, a bit nervous?" Sezille laughed with some bitterness. "Subconscious resentment against what's going on—they're sabotaging victory." He grinned. "If I could only settle with one of them, one of them! So long."

PROSPER returned from the fields after dark. He listened to his mother's story concerning Nicolas, nodded. After supper, which was plain, meat, potatoes, cabbage, he invited Bruce casually to a game of cards. Bejart, whose connection with the farm was not quite clear, and a foreman called Bastien, were included. Bruce Kerrigan was not a bad player at *belote,* but he was among experts. He had to concentrate to hold his own.

Mother Jeanne sat by, bringing new bottles when needed. They drank a local wine, from grapes grown around Forlagne, a nice liquid checking fourteen or sixteen percent. There were crackers, wedges of cheese, slices of smoked sausage handy. During the tense hands, when no one spoke, the big old clock in its shiny case ticked importantly. It should have been very restful and pleasant. It was not.

The same sense of intolerable tension which had oppressed Bruce in the morning had returned. Bastien alone seemed to escape it—he was laughing, cheerful. He left before ten o'clock, richer by fifty or sixty francs. Less than twenty cents, American, in the Black Market, Bruce thought. Bejart followed him inside ten minutes. Prosper had gathered the cards, put them in a box. He looked at his mother.

"The cops were here this morning, Maman?"

"You know they were. And you know what for."

"Yes." Prosper played with the box between his thick fingers. "That—" he looked

at the ceiling, "had nothing to do with that fall and sprained hip of the kid?" He nodded at Bruce to remain, as the American was about to leave. "Oh, stay, I beg you. My mother has no secrets from you, so I haven't."

"Prosper, Prosper," Mother Jeanne said, pleading.

"It's all right. Understand, Monsieur, that I am a lout, a brute. I stayed here and worked, flattened myself before the Boches to keep our cattle, but I am not a hero. I never was sent to fine schools like Alain, like Colas is going to be. I am not a patriot, I just work to support those who are."

"We didn't have the cash when you were a boy—"

"No. And then I wasn't smart in school." His face grew white. "But, damn it, I never stole, I never had the cops around—you never had to lie to cover me."

"Are you so sure?" Mother Jeanne asked gently.

"Sure? Never mind that. Suppose I go upstairs and have a look at that hip? No, I mustn't disturb him. The guards up there shoot a prowler, the cops come around, stuff is missing, Colas is in bed, but nothing connects with anything. I suppose I can't search his room."

"You cannot," his mother agreed.

"And why not? I am the man, the head of the family."

"And I am your mother, and I tell you you cannot bother my youngest when he is sick, or I'll forget I am your mother."

Prosper looked at her for a long minute.

"That's a pretty scene in front of a guest," he concluded. He rose, stretched his arms, yawned. "Well, I did not invite anyone. If we have to entertain all of Alain's regimental comrades, we'll have a bit of a mob around here." He smiled down at Bruce. "Not that I have anything against you. And I wish you luck in whatever you came here for. *Bonsoir.*"

He went out, slammed the door into the hall.

"Bruce, don't pay any attention to him. You know you are welcome here, this is Alain's home, too. He is trying to anger you so you'll leave."

"That's easy to see," Bruce admitted.

"But you'll stay?"

"Yes, if only to find out why he wants me to leave."

"It's a little as if Alain had come to help me."

Bruce was moved by the simplicity of this appeal. That was the charm of these people, they did not dread trite, worn words—they read very little, saw very few movies, and they were unaware that love, hate, friendship were "corny" and needed refurbishing.

BRUCE rose earlier the next morning, had a cup of black coffee and went for a swim in a mountain pool fed by a lovely little brook flowing over pebbles, between willows. Antoinette, the maid, laid his breakfast on the table when he returned. She chatted a lot, mostly about America, where she had a cousin who was a cook and earned more than a French judge. But she would never go there, because they used fruit jams with meat and ruined their stomachs with ice water. One was poor in the Jura, but one ate right and lived very long.

Bruce was agreeing with her when a car entered the yard—a long limousine, of Belgian make, eight or ten years old but beautifully kept, new paint job, shining metal. The chauffeur, in a gray uniform, peaked cap, leather puttees glittering like mirrors, opened a door, and a gentleman alighted. He came into the kitchen, addressed the maid. "I want to speak to Madame Matignon."

"She's upstairs. Sit down and wait."

"Please inform her I am here."

"She don't like being disturbed. You wait."

The gentleman looked back at the chauffeur, who stood near the door, but evidently decided on diplomacy. He sat down, not far down the table from Bruce, who nodded pleasantly, smiled. The other moved his chin imperceptibly, looked away. In his old sweater, with his hair damp from his plunge, Bruce did not look like an outsider.

The man was about sixty, tall and stout. He had wide shoulders, a thick neck, but a comparatively small head, and small hands. His hair, almost all white, rose like a brush from a fine forehead, his cheekbones were high, his nose and mouth thin. Wealthy, judging by the car, the

chauffeur and the superb summer suit, cream-colored, silky. Bruce noted the ribbons in his button-hole, Legion of Honor with rosette, War Cross 1914-1918, and two more he could not identify. From his attitude, his appearance, Bruce thought he might be a magistrate of some sort, he looked as if he were accustomed to be obeyed.

"Where is your mistress?" he asked again after three minutes.

"Upstairs, as I told you. Her boy's sick and she is with him."

"Where's the room? I'll go up."

"Oh, no, you won't," Toinette said calmly.

"Leonard," the man called, and the chauffeur entered slowly.

"I have a kettle of boiling water at your disposal," the maid announced. Then she laughed, "Oh, well, I'll call her." She went into the hall, and shouted, "Mother Jeanne, Mother Jeanne, a visitor."

Mother Jeanne came down immediately. Her smile of welcome vanished as she saw the two strangers. The important chap rose, bowed formally. "I am Doctor Nordstrom, Madame Matignon—"

"I recognized you, *Monsieur le docteur*, we've been neighbors more than twenty years, you know."

"And I am happy that I have the occasion, at last, to call."

"Is that your chauffeur?"

"Yes, Madame, but I—"

"You might have had him educated—he could take off his cap when there are two women present!"

Nordstrom looked around, Leonard took off his cap. Bruce refrained a laugh—Mother Jeanne had put them in their place properly, in true feminine fashion.

"Now, Monsieur, your business, please?"

"I am informed that your young son is ill, Madame, and came to offer my services."

"We have a doctor for him, Doctor Sezille, of Aurebois."

"But I was speaking to your son, Monsieur Matignon, and he suggested that I see the boy. If I may say so, my longer experience—"

"I am satisfied with Doctor Sezille."

"Very well. But I must see the boy."

"I am sorry. You shall not see him."

"Forgive me for insisting, Madame, I shall see him. In fact, I have your oldest son's authorization to examine him and if I judge it advisable, to take him to my establishment. There is ample room in the car, and we brought a stretcher—"

"My son had no right to authorize you to anything."

Doctor Nordstrom grew irritable. A faint pink tinge appeared on his jowls.

"We'll take that up later. Meanwhile, I must see the boy immediately."

"No."

"I assure you it will be better—otherwise, I must call again with the gendarmes—"

"And a warrant to search?" Mother Jeanne wondered. "That will expose you to a suit later."

"I must see him. I must speak to him, at once."

"No."

"We'll see." The doctor stepped forward and Mother Jeanne stood before the entrance into the hall.

"Leonard—" Nordstrom called.

The chauffeur came forward in his turn. He did not like the job ahead of him, obviously, but he had to obey orders. Bruce rose, motioning for Toinette not to intervene, and walked to the woman's side. He said nothing. The chauffeur hesitated.

"I warn you not to interfere, my friend," the doctor addressed Bruce. "You don't know what this is about. Leonard—"

"But, *Monsieur le docteur*, it is assault—"

"What are you paid for? The responsibility is on me."

"Please, Madame, let's have no trouble," Leonard said.

For five seconds, no one moved and no one spoke. Bruce was amazed at the doctor's persistence. Either he had lost his temper completely or the matter must be of extreme importance. Then Leonard, who had to obey, reached out to touch Mother Jeanne. Bruce had spent long hours learning commando fighting with bare hands, and had never had occasion to use his knowledge. Those Germans he had met invariably had guns handy. He decided to use his skill—control Leonard without really hurting him—he had done the trick hundreds of times in training. Facing one's opponent, one seizes his right

shoulder with the left hand, the left shoulder with the right hand, then, simultaneously—

The chauffeur, a bit shorter than Bruce, was a muscular, stocky chap. Bruce acted with lightning speed, but so did he—and the ex-raider caught a beautiful right hand punch on the face, a little too high to knock him cold, but enough to rattle him. He let go with a left hook, without thought or aim, and Leonard sat down hard.

The next moment, Toinette pressed something into his hand, a sort of wooden mallet.

The chauffeur picked himself up. Blood oozed on his chin. He looked at Bruce, who held the mallet ready, at the doctor, and reached under his uniform coat. Bruce lifted the tool, and the hand reappeared empty. There was another silence.

"Never mind, Leonard." Nordstrom looked at Bruce. "I think you'll regret meddling. You shall hear from me, Madame."

He left the kitchen, Leonard followed sheepishly. The big car backed, turned and shot out of the yard. Toinette, grumbling, mopped up the spots of blood.

"I am sorry, Bruce. Hope there'll be no trouble."

"Nothing to worry about," Bruce said. "He was forcing his way into your home, that flunkey touched you first. He's lucky I didn't have to use this thing."

Mother Jeanne shook her head. "That man makes rain or shine around here, Bruce. But I couldn't let him take Colas, up there."

"How is he, by the way?"

"Oh, he's all right. Hardly any fever."

"Would it be all right for me to talk a while with him? Nordstrom acted like a madman and the more I think of it, the more it looks as if he wanted to see the kid to scare him into keeping quiet."

"Talk to him, then."

CHAPTER IV

INTENT TO KILL

NICOLAS resembled Alain so much that Bruce felt a sort of sad twinge. But the boy grinned. "Could I sneak a smoke, Bruce?"

"Your mother wouldn't like it."

"If she comes up, I'll toss it in the pail. Look, if I'm old enough to get shot, I'm old enough to smoke. Just one?"

"Here. Now suppose you bring me up to date on things, Colas."

"It's a long story." Nicolas looked at the burning tip of the cigarette, grimaced and tossed it away. "Tastes funny. The other night, after you got here—"

"Take it easy, from the beginning."

"All right. It's kind of mixed up. Well, you know the Sana gets all its help from the outside, no local people allowed. That's supposed to be to keep gossip about the patients from spreading, it says 'discretion guaranteed' on their prospectus. Everyone, doctors, nurses, cooks, waiters, guards, stenographers, come from the outside. Nobody is supposed to walk out of the place alone, anybody caught talking to a local person gets the sack.

"There's a steward goes to Forlagne for some stuff, like milk, butter, eggs, fresh vegetables, but even then nobody sits down in a cafe or goes into the inn. When they get time off, they go out of the region, by car, they never use the train."

"Yes, I get it. Go on."

"Every so often, the big car brings in some pretty girls, entertainers, dancers, singers. They stay up there a few days, three days, a week, it depends. You know there are some rich patients—they live in separate houses they call bungalows, can't see them from this side of the mountain, they're on the far slope. They throw some wild parties, like in the movies, with champagne and caviar and roast pheasants.

"Albert managed to peek in at some of them, and he told me plenty, rough stuff, dames dancing without their clothes, but he never would take me along, said it was too dangerous. See, maybe they're not supposed to have that sort of business going on in a sanatorium, so they watch carefully.

"Albert was smart. He'd made a schedule of the watchmen's rounds, knew how to duck them. Usually two or three guys with guns, with a big dog on leash. They've got four big dogs, very fierce, specially trained. They always take one on their rounds."

"Why don't they just turn them loose at night?" Bruce wondered.

"Because of the patients. Some of them

are pretty nutty—they're in the special wing, over the garages." Nicolas laughed. "They get loose sometimes and I guess the Sana doesn't want its dogs bitten. Then the regular patients like to stroll around the park, they call the big grass stretch between the main dump and the bungalows the park, to look at the moon. And, too—"

"I see they can't let the dogs loose. Go on."

"Well, Albert was a good-looking guy, about the best-looking guy around here. Strong, too, and fast. Nobody could beat him at anything at school. He did the hundred in twelve. All right. Those parties started up there just about a year ago. The cars never stopped in the village, but if you watched for them, you could get a look at the girls. Albert found out they came fram an agency in Paris, just like the *entraineuses* in night clubs. That's what started Albert going up nights.

"Then—well, I got to explain. The snow is pretty deep around here in the winter, and sticks quite a while. That makes trouble for the cars at times. Maybe six months ago, one of them, a light car, broke down up the mountain. The guy you socked, Leonard, was driving. He had to leave it and climb over the fields to the Sana, to get some tools and parts. Albert was around, and he saw a girl inside. She wasn't an actress, she was just an employee who'd been down to Aurebois on errands.

"Just the same, she was pretty. Albert got to kidding with her. He told her he had to go into the Army soon, to make her think he was at least twenty. She said her name was Margot, she was twenty-two. She was no maid or nurse, or anything like that—her job was mending linen and curtains.

"When she spotted Leonard coming back, she begged Albert to go away. He knew it meant her job, so he did as she asked. But after that, he'd sort of hang around, hoping the car would break down again. It never did, but one afternoon, she threw him a note wrapped around a pebble. From the car window. She made a date for that night at eleven. I know the place but I can't explain, you'd have to know. Maybe two hundred meters outside the wire fence.

"Albert sneaked out of his room—he lived over the dairy—and met her. He told

"Now suppose you bring me up to date on things, Colas," said Bruce.

me all about it. Kissing and sweet talk. He found out a lot of things about the patients. They've got an old guy in there who'll eat anything if he's not stopped. Been there twenty years. Used to be Minister for Public Education, too—"

"So Albert met her, and—"

"He saw her about twice a week. I wanted to go along, but he said I'd queer things, because I am only a kid—but he told me everything."

"So what happened?" Bruce prompted.

"Well, one night—there was some moon, you could see pretty well, Albert gets to the meeting place and who comes out but that guy Leonard. He has a gun, and he tells Albert to stand still and listen. He held one of those little tommy-guns the Boches had. He called Albert all kinds

of bad names, a punk, a slob, that he's been wise a long time, but that he likes the girl who's got people to support and if she got sacked where would she get a job like this one, good money and no expenses?

"He said that the girl, Margot, had found out that Albert was just a fresh kid and she was through with him. He said Albert was lucky and that the next time he caught him snooping around at night he'd shoot him.

"ALBERT could not get to see the girl to talk it over. He talked a little crazy, then, said they'd better watch out, that they were hiding Boches up there. Then he got the nutty idea Margot thought he was a coward because he didn't go to the meeting place. So one day, maybe three weeks after, he was in a garage down at Forlagne, getting some gaskets for our stuff, when Leonard stopped for gas. At first, Leonard made out he didn't know Albert, because his boss was sitting in the car, but when Albert mentions the girl, Leonard hauled off and hit him on the jaw.

"When Albert came to, the big car was gone and the garage guys were standing around, laughing. They told him that Leonard had been a professional boxer. After that, Albert never got a good chance at the guy, Leonard ducked.

"I guess Albert must have been kind of in love with the girl, even if he pretended to kid about her. He tried to see her. You don't get into the Sana easily. There's the barb-wire fence down the road, and about three kilometers inside, around some of the buildings, walls eight feet high. And the guards with the dogs. But Albert managed to find her one night.

"She was scared stiff. She told him if he was spotted, they would both be killed. She said she had tried to quit, but that they wouldn't let her, that even her mail was watched. He asked her if she wanted to get out and she said yes, but how. He said he would fix it. He couldn't just take her away that time, because he had to get things ready.

"You know, because the Sana spends a lot of money in the vicinity, the people there can get away with anything around here. They've got the mayor, the cops, everybody up their sleeve, and even at Aurebois, lots of people work in with the Sana. Also, Albert was a public ward, under age. He needed false papers, making him twenty-one, some money and the use of a car for a couple of days. Once in a large city, say in Lyons or Dijon, the two could be arrested and questioned. Albert might be sent back here, but there was no legal way to hold the girl. See?

"I had some money saved, and got some more one way or another. Albert could not take our old car, because we knew that Prosper would do anything the Sana people asked of him, and he would have him pinched for stealing the old thing.

"Without explaining everything, I took in a couple of friends from school in on the scheme. I was promised the loan of a car, but from Forlagne only. My friends were afraid to risk coming up around here. If Albert and his girl got to the village, they could have the car.

"So he started up the mountain one evening, with a bike. He was to bunk it somewhere, get inside, get the girl out again, and she would ride down to Forlagne on the handle-bars. I wanted to go with him, but he said I'd better not. Prosper is looking for a chance to save money on my education. And if I got arrested and maybe got six months' correction, I'd be barred from lots of schools.

"Next morning, I see the bike standing at its place in the shed. There's no sign of Albert anywhere, he doesn't show up for breakfast. But if he's gone, I think, how did the bike get back? So that afternon, I biked down to Forlagne myself and asked my friends. They told me Albert hadn't gone through Forlagne, or anyway hadn't whistled the signal agreed upon.

"After three days, Prosper notified the cops that Albert had run away. I tried to get them to look around the Sana, but they only laughed at me. You see, I couldn't explain anything much to them. That would have made me accomplice and accessory in an illegal entry. I went up and looked around, but the guards warned me away. There were guards all over the place. And I didn't even know the girl's last name, so I couldn't get in touch with her.

"I kept thinking that Prosper was a lousy brother, and wishing that Alain were around. I held out another week, and then wrote you. You came right away.

That gag about your nerves being shot is pretty good." Nicolas smiled. "I bet that Leonard don't believe it now."

"What's this talk about Boches in the woods?"

"Well, you know, in this sort of busines, you've got to think of everything. I couldn't mention the Sana, in case the letter was swiped. I'm under age and my people would be responsible in a libel suit." The boy nodded. "Albert said he heard a lot of loud singing at one of the parties, in German."

"Was he sure?"

"Sure? We heard them bawling often enough for years."

"Now, what happened to you the other night?"

Nicolas looked uneasy, frightened. "Almost got killed."

"I know, they shot at you," Bruce said sympathetically.

"They were going to kill me. I started to tell the doctor, then I thought I'd wait. But—I might as well tell you the whole thing. See, all I had to go on was what Albert had said. You came, and I knew it would be better if I had seen something myself, sort of scouted around. I thought, with Albert gone and all quiet for days, they wouldn't be watching so sharp. I climbed out of my window and started for the Sana.

"I got through the wire fence all right, no trouble. It's supposed to be electrified, but I don't think it is. After that, I felt sort of shaky and took it slow. I skirted the stone wall until it ended, and got into what they call the park. It's all grass and trimmed trees, with a brook and three little bridges. I went down the far side, and looked at the bungalows. Only one of them showed a light. I peered in, and there was nothing but a big fat guy, reading in bed.

"I felt sort of disappointed, and thought I'd try to see if I couldn't locate Margot. By going through the fence into the park and circling, you can get near the main building.

"I thought that if Albert had done it, I could. But a dog started to bark, then another. Not too loud, as if they were barking at the moon, but sort of low and careful. So I got out of it very fast, and found myself trapped against the high wall. I got into a chestnut tree—they have them grow-

The guards warned me away. There were guards all over the place.

Like a boob, I climbed into a big tree, very quietly, and waited for them to get tired—but the dog finally stopped right beneath me.

ing all over the inner court—and got over the wall, dropped on the other side. I started to run.

"I WAS already two or three hundred meters away when I heard the grilled gate in front of the main building open. I could hear several guys, talking low, to each other and to the dog. I slowed down to be quiet, and kept heading for the wire fence. It seemed a long way—even in daylight it's about forty minutes' walk—but I made it and slid under—

"On the other side, I thought I was safe. But they must have followed me beyond their limits. I wasn't prowling anymore, but I was afraid they'd beat me up just the same. And I kept thinking of Albert, too.

"Then they started calling to each other. There were at least three guys, and they'd spread out. I got to thinking I shouldn't get out into the open, away from bushes, because they were liable to shoot if they saw me. So, like a boob, I climbed into a big tree, very quietly, and waited for them to get tired. It took fifteen or twenty minutes, but the dog finally stopped right beneath me.

"Then a big electric torch went on, and they spotted me. One of them aimed a gun at me and told me to come down. There was nothing to do but do what they said. I came down, and they put that torch on my face. It blinded me so I couldn't see them.

" 'I know him,' said one. 'He's from the farm down below.'

" 'Well, what of it?' another asked.

" 'What did you want? What did you see?' the first asked.

" 'Nothing. I didn't steal anything, either.'

"'What do you say?' the second one asked. 'What do we do?'

"'I don't know. I'm getting sick of this,' the other said.

"Another guy came up from somewhere, then. But he just stood near and didn't talk. I asked them if I could go home, said I wouldn't bother them again. I was scared. Then a fourth guy came up. He wore a white coat. He asked them what they were waiting for, that they knew what to do. One of the others argued that it was risky. He knew my name, because he said I was the Matignon kid and there'd be one hell of a fuss.

"Then the guy in the white coat said they were crazy and what did they have to worry about? He told two of the guys to go away, taking the dog. I was still standing against the tree, with the light on my face. The guy in the white coat asked me a lot of questions, and I told him I'd seen nothing, nothing but a guy reading in bed in one of the bungalows.

"'Oh,' he said, 'you've been down there? Why?'

"I told him I was just curious. He didn't say anything then for a long time. I was sweating, with that light on me. Then he talked some more, to the other guy. 'I don't know—but we better make sure.' And he took the torch. The other guy started to swear under his breath, and I heard the snap of a gun being cocked. I knew that they were going to shoot me. I couldn't believe it, but I knew.

"So I made a break for it. The guy tried to keep the torch on me, but I ducked around this way and that way. The other started to shoot. Then they ran after me and the beam bounced all over the place, so the guy with the gun yelled to the other to stand still and give him a steady light. He let go another burst, then his gun stopped.

"While he was reloading, I'd broken through some bushes and dropped into a ditch. I stayed there, because I was out of breath—from being scared, not from running. I could feel my heart throb in my eyeballs. They looked for me, and got into an argument, so close to me I could hear every word. About missing me, about not holding the torch steady, about shooting me in the first place, about sending back the guys and the dog.

"'*Bondieu,* I had to,' the fellow in the white coat said to the other, and I knew that voice, all right. 'They were green with funk. If anything happened, they'd break inside ten minutes and spill everything. This way, they can't testify to something they didn't see. He can't be very far, let's keep looking—'

"They tramped around for quite a while, sweeping the torch about. I was scared that they'd whistle for the others to come back with the dog. I wasn't feeling so good. I started to creep from one clump of bushes to another between flashes of the torch.

"I was heading for the old quarry, because I know it, played explorer there as a kid, there's piles of stones and under the workings there are a lot of holes like little caves.

"Once in a while, they'd get near, still arguing about who was to blame. I heard the guy in the white coat—he must have been an orderly or even a doctor, he spoke better than the others—say one time, 'What the devil, he saw nothing and who'd believe him?' . . . 'Maybe we shouldn't mention it to the Boss,' the other suggested. White coat said, 'We better, he must have heard the shots.'

"When they started up slope again, I kept creeping down. When I saw their light flashing way off, I stood up and started to trot. It was then that I felt my leg. At first, it was the blood squashing in my sneaker made me know I'd been shot. I chewed on some leaves, made a paste and put it on the holes and made a bandage with my shirt. But the gadget wouldn't stay put when I moved. I would lie down and rest once in a while because I felt dizzy.

"It was almost day when I got back into the yard. I couldn't have climbed in the window. So I waited for a chance and sneaked in at the backdoor while the hands were eating." Nicolas laughed. "I made it, and didn't leave any tracks, either. I'd put on my rubber boots in the shed, and my leg bled into it!"

"You're pretty sure they intended to kill you?" Bruce pressed. "I'm not saying it isn't the truth, but—"

"Sure as can be." Nicolas looked at the American. "That's what happened to Albert."

(End of Part I)

ON THE SANTA FE TRAIL

By Lowe W. Wren

As cold as any startled thought
That leads to dread surmise—
A bleaching skull beside the trail—
Still haunted with surprise,
I lie, struck down—as I would strike—
Midway between the eyes.

Three covered loads, we camped at night
Back there beside the stream.
Dead tired we were, and woke confused;
I heard an arrow scream;
And then, beneath the silent stars
It ended like a dream.

The rains have washed the rest away,
Nor long shall I remain
Of those who came in Forty-nine
Reckless of fear and pain,
To challenge all that fate could loose
Upon the Kansas plain.

Contented men—the stay-at-homes—
Earn markers when they die;
The warrior dead gain monuments
To show where heroes lie;
No tombstone stands above our trail
Except the open sky.

DECORATION BY L. STERNE STEVENS

ILLUSTRATED BY
V. E. PYLES

SEAFARING

LANCER

By JOHN SCOTT DOUGLAS

Leaning down, North grasped Monise and swung him over the rail.

LYING alongside a small, rickety pier behind canneries and fishing-supply houses, he found the *Dauntless*. She appeared about thirty-eight feet in length, and a plank two-thirds as long extended from her bow, with a railed harpooner's "pulpit" at the end. This must be the one. Not likely two swordfishing boats at Newport Beach bore the same name.

He stared at her, ice-blue eyes narrowed, wide mouth compressed. He was tall, and an unbuttoned peajacket and open wool shirt hung loosely on his lean and muscular body. A knitted seaman's cap set far back revealed a salmon-pink forelock, and below it his face had vigor and authority and something of the frosty quality of far northern races.

Almost without thought he drew from his pocket the worn clipping that had brought him to Southern California. Doubtless mailed by a friend of Barney Nordall's, it was delivered to his ship when she ended her Bering Sea cruise and returned to the Aleutian whaling station at Akutan. Briefly it described an inquest to determine the cause of the death of Barney Nordall, 58, harpooner and owner of the *Dauntless*. Attacked by a swordfish he was pulling up to a skiff, he bled to death before his crewmates, Sam Ashton and Frank Monise, could start the engine. Unexplained was why, if those men had engine trouble, they had not hailed one of the numerous fishing boats plying the waters between Newport Beach and Catalina Island. *Or why they had not been charged with manslaughter!*

But the clipping no longer stirred the shock and anger of the first reading. All bitterness had been extracted from it and there remained the coldly restrained fury of a man who could not easily forgive.

NOW, looking at the boat, he could imagine her riding the swells with a great yellow-haired giant in the harpooner's pulpit, his squashed peaked seaman's cap set jauntily on his large square head, blue eyes gauging the distance to the sail-like dorsal fin in that last split-second before his powerful arm sent the pole down; then his exultant cry as the swordfish shattered the seas and the harpoon line rippled through the water. Or he could vision that great and vigorous man drinking the night through at some isolated whaling station; and, leaving his companions in a drunken stupor at dawn, head out into the wrathfully fluting wind roaring a Scandinavian song he'd learned as a boy, eyes clear, steps long and steady as he returned to his ship. That was the only way he could picture Barney Nordall. Not dead, not bleeding to death. For he'd always seemed imperishable as wind and sea, as immortal as the Viking gods he sometimes, half seriously, professed to believe still awaited lost whalemen in Valhalla.

But Barney Nordall was mortal and his crewmates had let him die without attempting to save him. And why? The *Dauntless* seemed to supply the clue, for he knew that Sam Ashton had bought it from Nordall's estate for $3,500. Certainly at present costs it was worth twice that! Had Sam Ashton sacrified a crewmate to buy his boat for half its value? The findings of the inquest, that it was an "unavoidable" accident, didn't impress him, but the force of law did. Direct measures could not be taken against Ashton and Monise, but they, too, could have "unavoidable" accidents through circumstances he could not now foresee.

The sound of voices made the tall man turn. Approaching were three people with lunch sacks and extra clothing who looked like holiday excursionists. Two were men—the older, with battered hat and plump and ruddy cheeks, looking like a farmer; while his companion, a short, dark man with a pleasant but serious air, appeared Portuguese. Accompanying them was a white-haired and motherly woman who peered at him through gold-rimmed spectacles with friendly curiosity.

The white-haired man smiled. "Good morning. Nice day for fishing." The woman and the Portuguese smiled also, but he only nodded. He didn't suspect this might be the crew of the *Dauntless* until the older man helped the woman aboard, for he'd forgotten letters mentioning that wives and sisters sometimes served in swordfishing crews. For a moment he was speechless; the men were far different from his mental picture of Nordall's mates.

Doubtfully he asked, "You're not Sam Ashton?"

The ruddy-cheeked man turned in surprise. "Yes; that's me."

"I—I've heard of you," the tall man said, and momentarily groped for a name. "I'm North . . . George North, harpooner. Like to get into swordfishing."

Ashton started to smile, then sobered. "Harpooner? You mean you've been away from swordfishing? In the service, perhaps?"

"I was in the Navy," said the man who called himself North. "But before and after my service, I served on Bering Sea whalers."

"*Whalers!* But they use harpoon-guns!"

"That's right. But I've used harpoons, also."

Ashton looked at his wife and grinned and she smiled back brightly. Even the Portuguese lost his serious air.

"Did you ever know a harpooner named Barney Nordall?" asked Ashton.

"Big yellow-haired man? Sailed out of Akutan? Went into swordfishing when the war closed the Bering to whalers?"

"That's the man! Greatest harpooner I ever saw." Ashton's eyes shadowed. "A broadbill struck him as he pulled it up to the skiff. Died on this boat."

Though North's muscles tightened, he masked his feelings.

"Nordall had whaling experience, too," Ashton said, brightening. "If you're half as good as he was, you're the man we want. Mother's been serving as boat operator and I've been doing the best I could with the harpoon until we found the right man. But I'm no harpooner."

"Broadbills," the Portuguese explained, "are small besides whales."

"He'll discover that, Monise," said Ashton. "Might as well go with us today, North. You'll have a chance to show what you can do."

He spoke of the way catches were shared by the crew and the boat, but North wasn't listening. He'd make his own terms when the time came. What troubled him

Barney Nordall seemed as immortal as the Viking gods he sometimes professed to believe still awaited lost whalemen in Valhalla.

was the kindly smile of the woman as she stepped to the pier. He had no quarrel with her; in all likelihood she'd never suspected that Barney Nordall's death could have been avoided. But should a man escape justice because his wife was unaware of his guilt?

"Take my lunch, Mr. North," she said in a motherly tone. "And I hope you'll have good luck."

"We'll be back before dark, Martha," Ashton said, stepping aboard.

He went aft to start the engines before climbing the ladder to the boat operator's deck above the engine-cabin. Monise cast off the lines and disappeared into the cabin.

North walked aft as the *Dauntless* backed into the channel. Presently she cleft the glistening waters as she chugged past moored fishing boats, canneries and small boat ways. Yachts and motor cruisers soon replaced fishing craft, and then summer homes, brightly painted and with neatly barbered lawns lined both sides of the channel.

As the summer residences gave way to drab rock breakwaters, Monise stepped from the engine-cabin with a mug of coffee which he handed up to the boat operator. His teeth flashed in a quick smile as he glanced at North. "Cream and sugar?"

"Black," said North, reluctant to accept favors from an enemy.

IN A niche in the aft end of the cabin was a small gas stove, and he studied it thoughtfully as Monise poured coffee into a mug. Gas fumes collecting in a closed cabin could, with a little help, cause an explosion that might appear accidental. Worth remembering . . .

He went aft to drink the coffee alone. Refusing Monise's offer of another cup, he washed the mug at the faucet and returned it to its hook.

The Portuguese, unabashed by his coolness, said, "I'll show you around, North, before I climb to the duck-seat. I'm lookout."

He strode forward to the braced plank. It was supported from the mast by a headstay, and on the bottom and sides other wires held it rigid. Light lines ran along both sides like railings to prevent a man from falling overboard as he walked it, and secured loosely to the starboard line by clothespins was the harpoon line, which ran aft to a box on the forward deck. Monise had already laid the harpoon across the top rails of the pulpit, making it fast with shackles.

"When I sight a swordfish, get in the pulpit. We have no wheel on a long shaft for a lookout to steer with on this boat, so I direct Ashton by voice from the duck-seat aloft. When we close in, my voice might startle the broadbill, so you point your harpoon whichever way Ashton's to go."

"Can he get the plank over the swordfish before it goes down?"

"Sometimes. But some sportsfishermen—the fellows who go after marlin—chase broadbill for the sport of it, and some broadbill are boat-shy. If they sound, do the best you can. Barney Nordall often drove a harpoon head clear through a broadbill fifteen feet under water, but there aren't many like him."

"No," agreed North curtly. "And when the harpoon's driven home?"

"The line rips out of the line-box fast. I secure the other end to the skiff on the stern, and you hurry aft to help me heave it overboard. The broadbill fights the skiff and in an hour and a half or a little less, it's worn out and can be pulled up.

"But meanwhile we're looking for the other broadbill. They often run in pairs, or even three or four together. Red kegs are made fast to the second line if we find the other swordfish."

North nodded.

They were nearing the end of the breakwaters. Ahead the sea rolled in long, gentle swells, iridescent with the play of sunlight. Far across the glistening waters and opalescent through the golden sheen of haze rose the mountainous slopes of Catalina Island.

Monise climbed the ladder and settled himself on the small seat projecting from the upper mast. Wearing dark glasses to reduce sun-glare, he sat motionless, only his head moving slightly as he scanned the shimmering sea. The *Dauntless* pitched lightly in the swells. Pelicans and gulls glided overhead. Rigging hummed softly in the crisp salt breeze, and the swells slapped lightly and seethed in muted whispers along the skin of the boat. An

hour passed before Monise sang out, his voice betraying excitement.

"Port your helm, Sam. . . More! . . . *More!* . . . Now steady!"

Far ahead, when the boat rose on the swells, North made out two moving dots close to the surface. From aloft, after many minutes, came a groan of disappointment.

"False alarm! Two cormorants flying one behind the other, not fins!"

Ashton laughed, and called down, "Had some coffee, North?"

"Yes. Plenty."

The sun grew hotter as the hours dragged on. Then a glistening back appeared off the port beam, and a jet of spray clouded the air. It was a California gray whale, and old habits were so strong that North reached the plank before he caught himself.

Ashton chuckled as the whale sounded. "Not with this boat, North!"

The tall man flushed and settled back on the hatch. A moment later an ugly hammerhead shark broke water, then left the seas aboil as it disappeared. Minutes later Monise was again deceived by low-flying birds. After discovering his mistake, he removed a sandwich from his pocket and munched it as he scanned the ocean.

Ashton called down for his lunch, and when the tall man handed it to him, advised North to eat. North had plenty of time, for Monise gave no warning cry.

CHAPTER II

SWORDPLAY

SEVERAL miles off the southern tip of Catalina Island, Ashton turned north to skirt the shoreline. Red and blue and white sails dotted the water, with here and there a bobbing swordfishing boat. But they saw no fins, and as they neared the northern tip of Catalina, Ashton turned homeward.

"Maybe you'll have no chance today to prove what you can do."

"Maybe not," said North.

A quarter-hour later, when most of the boats lay astern, Monise cried, "Starboard, Sam. Steady now—steady as she goes!"

The cry broke into North's conjectures about how he might contrive disasters for Ashton and Monise that would appear to be accidents. Now, much to his surprise, he found excitement aroused in him as when a whaler's lookout sighted a whale.

Something contagious in Monise's voice stirred North. "Starboard your helm, Sam. . . There—*steady!* . . . It's a big one, five hundred-fifty pounder, I bet you. . ."

"No such luck!" Ashton scoffed good naturedly. "How far, Frank?"

"A mile, maybe. . . *Steady!* . . . See it, Sam?"

"No—not yet."

"Right in line with that sail-boat?"

"No-o-o—*yes!* Saw its fins then!"

"Better get ready," the Portuguese advised North. "This one, it costs us ninety dollars if you miss."

"You judging its weight by its fins?" Ashton asked.

"Don't talk crazy! Twice I saw it clearly."

North worked along the plank to the railed enclosure. Two jerks freed the shackles and the harpoon. It had an arrow-shaped copper head, and the line to the center of this head would pull it crosswise once it had been driven inside a fish. The copper dart had a socket that fitted over the metal lily-rod of the pole; the pole was secured by another line to the pulpit rail. North tested the harpoon for weight and balance and was satisfied.

Monise still directed Ashton, the two men exchanging excited comments. But they had more altitude; minutes passed before North saw a sail-like blue fin slicing a swell, half a mile ahead. He forgot his bitterness toward his crewmates, forgot everything but the dorsal and caudal fins cleaving the water. The broadbill swordfish was small compared with whales he'd hunted in northern seas, yet the strange, uneven throbbing of his throat and the hard knotting of his stomach was the same.

When he saw the size of the great fish through the water, its long, swordlike snout parting the swells, North knew why even a whaleman like Barney Nordall could become a swordfisherman without apology. Broadbills were not only the largest food fish taken commercially, they were fighting fish, their sawlike swords weapons of power and destructive force. They had been known to attack whales, known to drive their swords through the oak timbers of ships. Watching the silver

and blue body gliding through the seas, North felt excitement quickening in him.

Tense as the day he'd harpooned his first whale, he now had more at stake. For he was on trial, his plans depended on remaining a member of the crew. Without realizing it he'd taken command, directing Ashton by pointing with his harpoon.

For minutes, as he rose and fell with the plank, the chase continued. Distance dwindled, but the broadbill remained beyond harpoon reach. The only sounds were the faint driving and creaking noise of the boat as it seethed through the swells, the deep throb of its engines.

Suddenly the broadbill veered sharply starboard, and diamond spray glittered in the sunlight as it sounded.

Boat-shy! thought North, his stomach tightening. *Rotten luck!*

He didn't wish to miss his first thrust, or let the fish escape, either. The boat plunged ahead, and through the boil of foam, he saw the broadbill five . . . ten . . . fifteen feet below the surface.

Instead of driving the dart home, he took the miserable chance of hurling the harpoon. Briefly it glinted before cutting the water.

"Missed!" said a voice like an expelled breath. It was Monise, behind him on the forward deck.

North wrenched the line and the pole detached itself from its embedded head. The waters erupted in an explosive turmoil. Blue and silver blazes gleamed in the foaming upheaval. The stricken broadbill flailed the seas with its sword, striking in pain and fury for an enemy. Its flashing caudal fin swirled the water in glistening whirlpools.

"Get clear!" shouted Monise hoarsely. "It may ram!"

Already the boat was turning to open water between the fish. Abruptly it submerged, only its fins visible as it moved like a projectile toward the bows. Crimson spread over its foaming wake.

"Get off that plank!" screamed Monise.

North realized his danger. If the swordfish leapt and broke the plank, he'd be in the water. It could impale him with its sword before he could be pulled aboard. He started aft, then stopped.

Water hissed and the swordfish was in the air, blue and silver lights flashing from its wriggling body. Both beautiful and terrifying in its insane fury, it seemed to hang poised between bow and pulpit. But that was an illusion, for Ashton had the wheel hard over, the boat was turning and when the swordfish fell, it missed the plank by yards.

North knew he should try to reach deck, though if the swordfish landed there, it would instantly be a shambles. But he was frozen, fascinated by the titanic struggle; he couldn't take his eyes from the seas churning and boiling off the starboard side.

Another seething rush of water and the broadbill was once more leaping, its sword quivering, body heliographing light, shaking to rid itself of the dart in its vitals. Then, falling with a splash, it went down, its fins slicing the seas as it moved swiftly off the starboard beam. Automatically North shackled the pole, noting the bent lily-rod as he did so. Line rippled overside, trailing the fish astern.

"Keep turning!" yelled Monise. "The propeller may part the line!"

He hurried aft, and North, still finding it hard to breathe, followed. The Portuguese had secured the end of the line to the skiff and was dragging it across deck. Together, they slid the small boat over the starboard side. The fish had vanished. But the harpoon line was taut. The skiff abruptly jerked, bobbed spasmodically twice, and began moving erratically.

The lookout struck North good naturedly. His teeth flashed in his dark, round face, his black eyes gleamed.

"What a throw! Sam Ashton could never have done it. Even Barney Nordall could hardly have equalled it."

North was moved despite his feeling for the man. Yet he had no illusions about that throw. Lady Luck had been at his elbow.

"Bent the lily-rod?" Monise asked. "I'll find another."

HE disappeared into the cabin and, after coming out, picked up a coiled fishing line before going forward. The coil he laid carefully in the line-box, but the harpon head he carried with him as he worked out to the end of the plank. After replacing the bent lily-rod, he fitted the copper head on it.

"Now we'll try to find the broadbill

that kept this one company," he said, leaving the plank. And a minute later he was aloft, peering out across the seas as the boat circled the skiff.

Minutes passed. North decided the large broadbill had traveled alone. Then Monise was giving the course again.

"Port about five degrees, Sam. . . Steady on—*steady!*"

North had scarcely reached the pulpit when he saw the fins of another swordfish dead ahead. Freeing the pole, he waited for the broadbill to veer port or starboard. It was clearly visible, less than three hundred yards ahead—a smaller fish of perhaps three hundred and fifty pounds. It made no effort to escape as the *Dauntless* closed water. North, resisting the impulse to raise the pole, kept it pointing at the fish as the boat drew closer, for the bows would presently obscure Ashton's view.

When the plank was but fifteen feet from the broadbill, he raised the harpoon. But the fish did not submerge and so he waited, holding his breath. Waited until the pulpit was dropping, directly over the gleaming caudal fin. Then his arm went back . . . and he thrust the pole down swiftly. The harpoon struck before the fish could turn.

North was drenched with spray. Blinking salt water from his eyes, he saw a pale greenish swirl of rising bubbles disappearing beneath the boat.

He hurried aft, but found that Monise had already dropped overboard three red keg buoys, made fast to the harpoon line.

"Check your lily-rod," shouted the Portuguese. "You'll find more below if you need them. We might sight other broadbills." And then he was climbing the mast to resume his lookout duties.

The boat circled the skiff and the bobbing kegs for another two hours, but Monise failed to see another swordfish. At length Ashton drew alongside the skiff and the Portuguese, watching the boat warily, jumped into it.

The *Dauntless* slowly circled. Monise was grave as he coiled the long line. Once or twice resistance made him appear uneasy, but the swordfish had exhausted itself fighting the skiff, and did not recover much line. When the tired fish appeared, the Portuguese drove the sharp blade of the whale-lance into its gills. It shuddered convulsively and then lay dead in the water. The little lookout signalled and the boat worked alongside the skiff.

Another seething rush of water and the broadbill was once more leaping, its sword quivering.

Monise tossed the harpoon line to North, but brought the skiff's painter aboard himself when he scrambled over the rail. Ashton left the boat in neutral and, after descending the ladder, started the winch motor and lowered the boom. Monise made the line fast to the lifting hook and presently the fish was brought aboard. They stepped back as it beat a rataplan on deck, a muscular reflex reaction.

"Four-seventy-five, I'd say," observed Ashton.

"Nearer five hundred pounds," Monise contended.

Ashton returned to the wheel and brought the boat alongside the buoys. The lookout jumped into the boat, hauled up and killed the smaller swordfish, and it too was lifted aboard with the winch. Not until the skiff was being hoisted did trouble develop.

After heaving it up partway, Ashton left the winch to help on North's side as they slid it over the rail. The bows rose on a swell, the boat slid aft toward Monise, and instinctively he released his hold and jumped back. But he stepped on a spot slick with spray and fish slime, skidded, and before he could recover his balance, struck the rail and fell overboard.

North was startled by Ashton's reaction. The older man slid the skiff over the rail to thud on deck, in utter disregard of its bottom. Pulling off shoes and jacket, he jumped overboard. Only when North stepped to the rail did he understand why. Monise was struggling in panic, his nose barely above water. He had the sense not to fight when Ashton's arm circled his waist. Ashton, though well past fifty, was a powerful swimmer.

"Cast me a line, North," he said.

North stood stupefied. His two enemies were in the sea, and he could operate the boat. Fate had played into his hands this first day. If he reported them missing, it would be another "unavoidable accident." But when he heard the faint seething rush of a ship and glanced up, a Coast Guard cutter was approaching. Seamen crowded the rail, for two men overboard was not commonplace. A score of witnesses! North saw at once that this wasn't the time, and that any further delay would betray his intentions.

"Don't need a line," North said; and leaning over, he grasped Monise's hand and swung him over the rail. The older man, because of his weight, was more trouble.

"Thanks," Ashton said, laughing. His plump cheeks were pink with the exercise, his childlike blue eyes twinkled as he smiled at Monise.

"What a guy! Frank has taken knives from drunken men and risks being attacked by a swordfish every time he pulls in one, but he's afraid of water and won't learn to swim."

Monise grinned sheepishly. "Plenty of fishermen can't swim, Sam."

ASHTON was still laughing as they went into the engine-cabin to find dry clothing. North found his knees shaking slightly, the aftermath of those moments when he considered allowing Monise and Ashton to drown. Luck had favored his crewmates this time, but he had learned something. Frank Monise could be pushed over the rail at any time when no other craft were nearby. The sound of the engines would prevent Ashton from hearing his cries for help.

A few minutes later the two men appeared with knives. Ashton was still in high spirits.

"You and Monise will clean the fish while we're returning to Newport Beach," he said. "But this time you watch how it's done."

While Monise cleaned the smaller one, Ashton worked with quick, sure strokes of the knife—cutting off the swordfish's head, removing its fins, most of its tail and slicing it open to remove the insides. He talked as he worked.

"We sight two broadbill and return with two. That's good harpooning, North, especially the first fish. We'll make as good a crew as when Barney Nordall was with us."

"You said Nordall died as a result of injury?" North asked.

Ashton sobered. "A broadbill rammed the skiff and he was leaning over. Its sword pierced his abdomen. He was bleeding badly when we helped him aboard."

"You rushed him to a hospital?"

"Couldn't. The engine wouldn't start."

"How long was it stalled?"

"A long time. Don't remember, exactly."

"Didn't you signal other boats?"

Ashton worked several minutes with the knife before answering. "There were none close. Nearest ones were pleasure sailboats."

"Even they might have been of some use when Nordall was bleeding to death."

"Yes," said Ashton. "But we thought we'd get the engine started."

North started to ask another question, but Monise interrupted. Glancing up quickly, he said almost angrily, "If you're afraid of swordfish, North, I'll pull them up."

"Now, Frank," chided Ashton. "North

knew Barney up north, and he's naturally interested." But a cautious note now changed his tone.

North sensed more strongly than before that Barney Nordall's death had been unnecessary. The unwillingness of the pair to discuss it freely showed they were holding something back. . .

In the weeks that followed George North did everything he could to allay the suspicions of his mates so that they would be off-guard when his moment came.

First he satisfied them with his skill as a harpooner, and this he did so well that the *Dauntless* came to be known as the "One-a-Day" swordfishing boat. Actually there were days when cold, raw winds kept the tropical-water broadbills below the surface and the boat returned with only a few skipjack or albacore tuna taken by trolling. But there were also memorable days when they returned with three or even four swordfish. So the boat's reputation was not greatly exaggerated. And his mates knew that a harpooner of North's skill would be welcomed on any number of boats.

But North tried to solidify his position in other ways as well. Often he jumped into the skiff to pull up broadbills, sparing Monise the risk of being thrown into the water if a swordfish rammed the skiff. And having had experience in younger days in cutting up whales, he could soon clean a swordfish more quickly than the Portuguese.

Ashton was delighted, and showed it by his affability. But Monise, though friendly, was more reserved. North's questions about Nordall seemed first to have aroused his suspicions, and even when the lookout appeared most friendly, he watched North's every move, seemed to weigh his words, and was always on guard. A shrewd little man, with a good mind, he was not easily deceived.

One day when Monise and North finished cleaning a swordfish, the Portuguese said unexpectedly, "You've never explained why you left whaling to follow less profitable swordfishing, North."

It took a moment for North to build a defense. "Look." And he pointed to the brilliant sun, to the bright sails dotting the blue seas. "You'd trade this for the north?"

"Not I," said Monise. "But I'm not of a northern race."

"I was born in the United States like you."

The Portuguese gestured impatiently. "You know that's not what I mean. I like it warm. Heat bothers you. I do not understand what brought you to California . . . why you stay."

"Good money in this, Frank."

"You don't strike me as a man who cares much for money."

"Not too much."

"That's what I thought. Then something else brings you." Monise ran the bloody blade along his finger. "I am not a man who does bad things easily. We Portuguese are easy going, but we can be driven to fight."

"What do you mean?" North demanded, but something recoiled in him and he knew the knife was a symbolic warning.

The lookout glanced up soberly. "Ashton is a trusting man, North, and he likes you. But I see things that escape him—something that you are hiding, the way

... ITS QUALITY
HITS THE SPOT!

you look at us at times." He paused and added with quiet emphasis, "You do not like us."

"What makes you say that?" asked North brusquely.

"It is something I feel."

Monise took the knife in his right hand and suddenly hurled it. North turned, and a chill crept through him. The point was embedded an inch into the port rail; the knife still quivered.

"It would be unfortunate for anyone attempting to harm Sam Ashton," said Monise, walking toward the faucet to wash up.

CHAPTER III

DANGER FROM THE PULPIT

NORTH watched for a change in Ashton's manner, but detecting none, decided the lookout had said nothing to the older man of his suspicions. For that matter, there was no change in Monise. He was still quietly friendly, though still watchful.

So North continued making plans for Sam Ashton and Frank Monise. He saw many ways that a man might do away with a mate, while making it appear like an accident, or without drawing suspicion to himself. But no plan seemed quite right, and the appearance of the Coast Guard cutter that first day made him realize the danger of being observed unless he observed extreme care. While he plotted retribution for his mates, he gave no thought to the possibility that they might likewise have their suspicions and be planning his death.

This possibility was driven home one day very forcefully.

The *Dauntless* was closing in on a swordfish, but George North delayed going out on the plank as long as possible. The boat was pitching and plunging in the swells, the pulpit occasionally dipped into the seas as the stern rose. At length, working along the plank, he was aware that it was not as rigid as usual. It stayed and creaked each time the bow dropped away.

North, having lived most of his life on ships, had good sea-legs, but nevertheless he could scarcely keep his feet in the railed enclosure. After freeing the harpoon, he crouched and gripped the rail to keep from going overboard. The broadbill was still over a hundred yards ahead, but the seething rush of the seas made it hard to see. North looked up to clear his vision. The sunlight was bright, but wind and heavy seas had driven all but a few albacore and swordfishing boats to shelter. An approaching "plank-boat," less than a half-mile away, seemed to be heading back to Newport Beach.

North brought his pole to bear on the broadbill and at that moment it happened.

A big swell smashed against the pulpit, nearly sweeping him from his feet. The bobbing of the plank told him the swell had struck the bows with considerable force. Behind and somewhere aloft North heard a strained creaking and a high-pitched twanging sound. His harpoon was raised for the thrust and he was caught defenseless when the plank broke and dropped.

Before he recovered from his first start of surprise, he was in the sea. His weight in the pulpit made the topheavy plank roll. Before it could roll completely over, the boat was upon him. Its thrust bore upon his shoulders, his feet were driven against the plank or the pulpit rails, which he did not know. A shock of pain darting along his spine caused a momentary blackout.

North, a good swimmer, could ordinarily have freed himself of the entangling wire stays and the pulpit, which still held him beneath the plank. But when he was conscious enough to realize that the plunging boat no longer moved ahead, when he knew he would drown if he didn't fight his way clear and get air, every effort to move awakened such pain in his back that he was forced to stop struggling.

They guessed who I am, he thought dimly. *One of them filed the headstay so that my weight snapped it . . . let the plank break.*

Involuntarily he tried to breathe and when he inhaled water rather than air, he gagged and swallowed more. From then on it was a nightmare of blind struggle to escape, of agonizing pain, of gagging and choking and strangling for want of air. He was almost unconscious when something gripped his arm. Then reality ebbed away into a smothering web of blackness.

Ashton was applying artificial respiration when he regained consciousness. Every movement of his hands to restore normal breathing caused darting pain in North's back. His head was turned and from the corner of his eye, he glimpsed the sodden and baggy knee of Ashton's dungarees and realized that the older man had saved his life. Then he'd been wrong: they had not plotted to kill him! But he wasn't so sure of that a moment later. Monise shouted, "He's coming around," and a voice called across the water, "Good! Then we'll push along."

The voices came from the swordfishing boat that had been approaching when the plank broke. And North suspected that it had saved him as the Coast Guard cutter had saved his mates, for Monise and Ashton had not dared let him drown.

"That's enough," North whispered. "I can breathe now."

Ashton stopped kneading his body. "Feel all right?"

"My back feels terrible."

"We'll get you to my doctor."

Ashton covered him with a blanket. The pair started cutting away stays so the plank could be pulled to the stern to be towed back. They were still working at this when North fell asleep.

Whatever part Ashton and Monise may have had in contriving a plausible accident, they gave every appearance afterward of having his welfare at heart.

North was awakened by two ambulance men rolling him gently onto a stretcher. Ashton was admonishing them. "Take good care of him. There's not a better harpooner at the Beach."

Taken to Dr. Graydin's surgery, he was admitted by a side door. The doctor appeared a few minutes later, a large, youthful-looking man with receding hair and a cheerfully professional air of competence. After describing the accident, North had a fluoroscope examination.

"Just a badly wrenched back, North. No break."

The pain of standing was so great that

Before he recovered from his first start of surprise, he was in the sea.

North lost consciousness twice while the doctor strapped his back. Dr. Graydin and the nurse helped him into one of the hospital cots in the back of the surgery. It occurred to North that if Graydin was Ashton's doctor, he might also have been Nordall's.

At mention of the name, the doctor's eyes lighted. "Barney Nordall? Yes, he was a patient just after I got out of the service. Always thought that if he'd had a horned helmet, chain mail and grown a beard, he'd have looked like one of his Viking ancestors. Nordall belonged in a Norse saga."

The nurse had left the small hospital room, so North asked, "Did you sign his death certificate?"

The doctor nodded, a subtle change coming into his manner. "I'll talk about Nordall as a man, North, but a doctor doesn't discuss patients." And with that, he left.

THAT evening Ashton and Monise came to the surgery. Ashton's ruddy face was sympathetic as he removed a napkin from a bowl.

"Martha made a pudding for you, North. Says she hopes you'll be on your feet soon. Guess she doesn't like boats."

North was embarrassed, not wishing to accept favors from anyone who had done what this man had done to Nordall.

"Thanks," he said coolly. "But they take good care of me here."

"Well, Martha wanted to do it." And Ashton laughed. "You can't argue with a woman."

"The doctor tell you how long you'd be here?" Monise asked soberly.

"Not any longer than I can help!"

"We'll be laid up several days, anyway," Ashton said jovially. "While the plank's being fixed." Removing a check from his pocket, he placed it on the bedside stand. "Your share for this week, North, just in case you're short."

This thoughtfulness irked North because he suspected that Ashton and Monise might be responsible for his accident.

"I'm well heeled," he said.

Each day the older man brought cookies or cake that his wife had made, and when Ashton resumed fishing, he laughingly described how he missed swordfish.

"Can't teach an old dog new tricks, North. I'll never be real good with a harpoon. Looks like slim pickings until you're back."

North was so unwilling to accept favors from the Ashtons that he left the surgery eight days later, with his back still strapped for support. For days it was an ordeal to stand in the pulpit, and driving in a harpoon was so painful that he had to clench his teeth to stifle a moan. He missed several easy thrusts as a result, but nevertheless the boat's catches picked up appreciably. Both of his mates gave every appearance of being grateful to have him back.

North had steered whalers, and even before his back was strong again, he began to take the wheel for short periods to relieve Ashton. Returning to Newport late one afternoon, he was at the wheel when he heard a sound behind and turned to see Monise. The Portuguese made a faint motion toward his knife as if a reminder that it was there. His dark face was deadly serious.

"Turn back—Ashton's overboard!"

It wasn't necessary for him to climb to the boat operator's deck to report that. Clearly he didn't trust North.

North turned and saw Ashton tossed by a swell far astern.

"How'd it happen?"

"I didn't see him go overboard. I suppose he was pulling in a skipjack at the stern when we hit a swell. Are you turning back?"

With no doubt about what Monise would do if he refused, North had no choice. "Think I'd let a mate drown?" he asked, spinning the wheel.

"That's what I wonder."

"I wouldn't do anything you wouldn't do, remember that!"

If that struck home, Monise gave no sign. He remained at North's elbow until the boat ran alongside Ashton. Then he hurried down the ladder and quickly pulled the older man aboard, as if expecting North to change his mind. His action left no doubt of his suspicions.

North still smarted from the experience when the *Dauntless* sailed down the channel next day. Standing alone on the forward deck, he watched the breakwaters slide astern. Ahead the blue waters shimmered dazzlingly. The balmy offshore

breeze caused hardly a ripple. And in the clear, soft air, Catalina seemed scarcely farther away than the rolling, golden hills behind Newport.

Less than an hour later, Monise reported the first broadbill. North went out to the pulpit to wait. The blue fin moved straight ahead, and the swordfish attempted no evasive tactics. The plank was casting its shadow over the broadbill's caudal fin before North drove the harpoon down.

With a silver cascade of spray, the fish vanished, rippling line through the glimmering sea. North hurried aft to help Monise set the skiff adrift with the line.

Monise said without smiling, "Few could equal you as a harpooner, North."

"But as a mate you don't think much of me?" North asked dryly.

Monise shrugged, and returned to the duck-seat. And less than five minutes later, he sighted another fin. It was a short chase. Once more North placed the harpoon within an inch of the spine.

Keg buoys were lowered with the line.

When Monise reported again, his voice held a note of elation. "Two fins, Sam! About a quarter-mile apart. Godfrey, there's a third!"

"I see one," said Ashton. "Are we running in luck at last?"

"Could be," said the Portuguese. "Now you're on. Steady!"

North caught the contagion of their excitement; his hand shook as he fitted a new lily-rod to the pole. *Watch yourself,* he cautioned himself. *You'll be getting buck fever!* Overconfidence was not one of his faults; he never allowed himself to grow careless.

It was well he didn't, for the next broadbill was boat-shy. It veered away. When the boat turned to follow, it submerged. Ashton fortunately did not reduce speed. The pulpit was over the spot where the fish had vanished in a moment. North saw the broadbill again, twelve feet below the surface and swimming to port. It was a meager chance, but he drove the pole down.

The waters were roiled by swirling currents, the broadbill jack-knifed its shimmering body in three wild leaps, after which the line sped through the seas. Ashton turned port as a series of bubbles burst on that side. "Masterly thrust, North! Don't you ever miss?"

"I miss plenty!" North snapped. "Pipe down! You'll jinx me."

Looking back, he saw the Portuguese casting off another set of keg buoys. North brought another line-box forward, fitted a head to the lily-rod and returned to the pulpit.

They closed in on another broadbill within minutes. It was a smaller swordfish, weighing less than two hundred pounds, and made no attempt to escape. Though it looked like easy prey, North was fully as careful as if it were wary. He drove in the harpoon head close to the spine, and Monise once more buoyed the line with kegs.

"Four!" Ashton cried. "Only once before has the *Dauntless* ever taken four swordfish in so short a time, and that was when Nordall—"

"We must take another," shouted Monise, his reserve cracking. "We got one more set of kegs."

North smiled wryly. "Broadbills can't count!"

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But he was infected by their exuberance, had an unsteady feeling inside that concerned him. *You're getting ready to blow up,* he told himself. *Get hold of yourself before you start missing!*

Monise went aloft. The fifth broadbill he had seen was now a mile northward. The *Dauntless* turned north with a bone in her teeth, for the seas were puckering under a stiffening breeze. Five minutes later Monise sighted two more pairs of fins off the port beam. They were less than a quarter-mile away, so Ashton changed course.

CHAPTER IV

THE DAY FOR RETRIBUTION

NORTH, once more in the pulpit, was talking to himself, trying to recover control. His nerves had steadied by the time the boat closed in on the nearest broadbill. The bobbing plank crept closer to the fins cutting through the riffled sea. He drew back his arm and as he started his thrust, bluish-silver streaks glinted in the water, marking the fish's changed course. He tried to aim straight but the result was not good. The head was driven into the side of the fish, where it might pull out.

"Damned clumsy fool!" he growled in annoyance. "Should have belayed that thrust and tried again!"

Still annoyed at his first error of the day, he missed the next swordfish entirely, although it was an easy target.

"Can't get 'em all," called Ashton sympathetically.

Blazing mad, North made no reply. The swordfish was still visible. He jerked back the harpoon and with but the hastiest attempt to aim, sent it plunging, somewhat in advance of where he'd last seen the fish. Suddenly the seas erupted and a fighting broadbill, flashing in the sunlight, was taking line.

Ashton broke into spontaneous laughter. "It's your day, North!"

Behind the harpooner, Monise yelled, "We have no more floats!"

North turned, his light-blue eyes narrowing. "Bend the line around your damned neck, Monise. If you let that fish escape. . ."

"But is it my fault. . . ?" the Portuguese began, to be interrupted by North's brusque order. "Empty that five-gallon water container, screw on the top, and make the line fast to the handle. It should be enough!"

Monise hurried to drop the metal container overboard. The fish pulled it beneath the surface, but it was watertight and in a few moments bobbed up again.

The Portuguese went aloft and reported that all fins had disappeared. The boat circled for an hour, and Ashton was heading back to the skiff to bring up the first broadbill when Monise sang out.

"Port your helm. Keep turning. There! Steady now!"

The broadbill must have risen within the past minute for it was less than three hundred yards ahead. North hurried out onto the plank and immediately began directing the boat with his harpoon.

Monise, descending to deck, came forward to ask, "What the hell am I to do if you put the dart in that fish? We got no more water containers!"

"Don't bother me," North snapped. "Rip out the stove's gas tank for all I give a damn. Close the valve tight, though, if you do."

He heard the Portuguese pounding aft and once more concentrated on the fish. Some sixth sense told him it was boat-shy even before it turned sharply and submerged. North plunged the harpoon before the sailfin had quite disappeared—a long thrust that required every inch of the pole. The seas were lashed into foam before the wildly fighting broadbill ran with the line.

"*Seven!*" cried Ashton hoarsely. "Only a few boats have ever taken seven broadbills."

"They're not aboard yet," said North, striding aft.

The lookout had taken him at his word. The butane gas tank went overboard with the line as he reached the stern.

North stopped, struck by a sudden thought. This was his day—the day when luck was with him at every turn. It might be the day he'd awaited so long, if he watched his chance. The day for retribution.

However, the chance didn't come for some time. The *Dauntless* searched a while longer but the offshore breeze had an afternoon chill that kept the swordfish

down. At length they went alongside the skiff and North jumped into it. His was the back-breaking work of pulling in the first three swordfish. Ashton then relieved him, heaving up the next two. His second broadbill was the one struck in the side, and the copper head pulled out just as the boom swung it over the deck, where it landed safely. North regarded it as a sign that his luck was still holding, that his chance was coming.

Catalina Island had disappeared in the dusk and Newport Beach was visible only because of its lights when Monise climbed into the skiff to pull up the last two swordfish. The first one, made fast to the water container, gave him no trouble, but the broadbill secured to the gas tank still had fight.

The lookout had brought it almost close enough to kill it with the whale-lance when the seas were spangled with flashes of phosphorescence—the bright passage of the broadbill moving swiftly toward the skiff. It had drifted several hundred yards from the boat. Ashton moaned. In the darkness there were streaks of phosphorescent fire as Monise cast the gas tank overboard in an attempt to make the swordfish attack it rather than the oared boat.

Sparks of sea-flame swirled through the water as the broadbill swerved from the splashing tank, then turned again toward the skiff.

Monise jumped to a thwart and stabbed with the bladed lance, but missed. A moment later they heard the crunch of the broadbill's sword splintering the boards. The skiff leaped from the water, the impact throwing the Portuguese clear. There followed rending, splintering sounds—the fish slashing in all directions with its terrible weapon. The skiff was demolished by its destructive fury until only an upturned keel and broken parts of the gunwale and bottom boards were visible. The heavier fragments, however, might have kept Monise afloat. But there was no sign of him. And presently the broadbill was gone, the turmoil ceased.

Near the gas tank, however, there were gasping sounds and a body was outlined in silver. Ashton, standing near the rail, called anxiously, "You hurt, Frank?"

North, once more in the pulpit, was talking to himself, trying to recover control. His nerves had steadied by the time the boat closed in on the nearest broadbill.

"No-o-o," came a shaken voice. "Got the scare of my life, though. This butane tank will keep me afloat, but you better pick me up quick. I'm already moving. The broadbill will be back to find out what's holding him."

Things had hapened too fast for North to plan. But now he saw that events had played into his hands.

Monise was right—the swordfish would be back. Left clinging to the tank even for minutes, he'd be killed. As for Ashton, if he were knocked unconscious and dropped overboard, he'd be unable to help the Portuguese or himself.

North spoke sharply as the older man swung from the rail. "Wait!"

Ashton's rounded jaw sagged slightly as he saw North's rigid body, his clenched fists. He swallowed, glanced up quickly and met the younger man's narrowed eyes.

"Glen Nordall!" he whispered. "Should have guessed!"

LIKE a sleep-walker, Ashton's hands locked. Resigned, without any trace of fear, he waited. He must have felt certain of the outcome, but he made no plea for mercy. Made no attempt to escape.

It was not this resigned fearlessness that made Glen Nordall, the man who called himself George North, stop with a jerk. It was not memory of Ashton's many kindnesses, the fact that Ashton had once saved his life, or the thoughtfulness of Martha Ashton when he'd been in the surgery that stopped him. Nor was doubt about the guilt of Sam Ashton and Frank Monise responsible. It went deeper. Back to something instilled in him as a boy by a great man who had taught him that every man must have a fair trial.

Barney Nordall had made it impossible for him to take justice in his own hands. He couldn't set himself above his mates like a merciless and avenging god. He realized now that he could never have let Ashton and Monise drown, that first day he was in the crew, even if the Coast Guard cutter hadn't taken matters from his hands.

"Damn me for a weakling!" North said in a dead voice, his hands dropping. "I can't do it!"

Ashton expelled a sharp breath. He brought up his hand and North thought he intended a blow, but made no effort to defend himself. Instead, the older man clapped him gently on the shoulder.

"Mercy isn't weakness," he said. "There, for just a second, you looked like Barney, the last time—"

"Before you killed him!" North said bitterly.

Ashton smiled sadly. "I was going to say that I knew you were hurt by something—that I thought you'd outgrow that hurt in time. Knowing you're Barney's son, I'm sure you will."

He climbed the ladder to the operator's deck. The *Dauntless* turned, and presently ran alongside the gas tank. North leaned over and pulled Monise aboard. He found another lance, hauled up the swordfish with the winch and killed it. It had little fight left by then.

Ashton stopped the boat and they cleaned the seven swordfish in silence. Finished at last, Ashton said soberly, "Frank, North's real name is Glen Nordall. You've heard Barney speak of his son, Glen."

Monise's eyes rounded, he started to smile, then frowned instead. "Why don't you use your right name?"

"He thinks we killed his father."

Looking indignant, the Portuguese opened his mouth to protest, then said slowly, "Oh!"

"The findings at the inquest," explained Ashton, "were that it was an unavoidable accident. I'll never know why, unless it was because every man there knew how Frank and I felt about Barney. We—we practically idolized that big guy!"

"Letting him bleed to death doesn't sound like it!"

Ashton peered at North. In the glow of the boat's lights, his childlike blue eyes begged the younger man to believe him.

"Glen," he said gently, "neither Frank nor I dared tell what really happened. No man would have believed us."

"Go on," North said.

Ashton hesitated. "Barney must have had some idea he was going to die. A month before his accident, he sold me a half share in this boat for $3,500. Suggested it himself."

Startled, North asked, "Didn't you pay that after my father died?"

"No," said Ashton in surprise. "I paid $3,500 for Barney's half share to his estate. Didn't you receive it?"

"Yes—and the balance of his estate," said North. "But I didn't know you were half-owner of the boat. I haven't revealed my identity here—haven't spoken to my father's lawyer, the one who settled the estate."

"He'll confirm what I say," said Ashton. "Now at the time of the sale, Barney didn't look well and sometimes he was moody, which wasn't like him. Seemed to become thinner every day, too. Frank and I thought something worried him, but he wouldn't admit it."

"Tell him about the accident," Monise suggested. "Maybe he'd have some idea what got into Barney."

"Before he got into the boat to pull up the broadbill that day," Ashton said, "Barney smashed the engines with a wrench. We didn't discover it until he was nearly dead."

"Why would he do that?" North demanded incredulously.

"Maybe because he was planning to drown himself and didn't want us to try to get him back and revive him," Monise suggested.

"Never heard such bilge!" North exploded. "No man ever loved life more than my father!"

"It was what happened afterward that made us believe that," Ashton said quietly. "He pulled up the swordfish and it still had some life and attacked him. Barney was in too much pain to throw himself into the ocean, if that's what he'd planned to do. Luckily the skiff had drifted alongside."

"He sort of revived when we got him aboard," Monise added.

Ashton nodded agreement. "He got hold of a harpoon and pushed himself up against the rail, and before Frank or I had any idea of what he was going to do, he raised it like he was about to throw it. He said, 'Don't move, mates. I'm taking my last cruise right here.' Anyone who had seen Barney use a harpoon wouldn't argue."

"It was a terrible experience," went on Monise, with a shudder. "Barney bleeding to death right smack before our eyes, standing there straight as a mast, with the harpoon ready to hurl, and his face growing whiter and whiter. We begged him to let us try to stop the bleeding, but he'd say, 'It's better this way.' Sometimes his mind wandered but if Sam or I made a move to grab the harpoon, his eyes would focus and he'd draw his arm back and whisper hoarsely, 'Don't make me do it, mates.' He was nearly dead when his arm dropped and the harpoon clattered to the deck. Ashton tried to do something for him then, and told me to start the engines. But then I found that Barney had smashed them—"

"Never heard any more baldfaced lying in my life!" North cut in bitterly. "If you hadn't invented a more plausible story for the inquest, you'd have been charged with manslaughter."

Ashton's eyes were sad. "We couldn't tell what really happened. Maybe Barney was out of his head with pain—"

North snorted, striding forward to be alone.

He didn't speak to Ashton or Monise when the *Dauntless* was made fast. He didn't help unload the swordfish. He strode along the pier, along darkened streets to the nearest service station, where

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he looked up the address of Dr. Paul Graydin.

He was still confused when he knocked at the doctor's door. A maid took his name, and a moment later the robust young doctor came to the door.

"Anything serious? I'm at dinner."

"I'm Glen Nordall."

Dr. Graydin frowned. "I should have noticed the resemblance. But why didn't you say so before? I know why you're here. Follow me."

He led the way into a den that had a well-stocked medical library on one side, and indicated a chair. The doctor sat down and leaned forward.

Barney got hold of a harpoon and raised it like he was about to throw it. He said, "Don't move, mates. I'm taking my last cruise right here."

"I don't discuss patients with strangers, but you have a right to know. I suppose you wonder why the engine of the *Dauntless* couldn't be started at the time your father was injured?"

"I know why. It was smashed."

"That didn't come out at the inquest, but that was my own theory. Do you know who smashed it?"

"Ashton and Monise claim my father did."

"I can believe that. Indicates a suicide attempt, doesn't it?"

"No man ever got more from life than my father, Doctor!"

"While he was well, Nordall. But your father was dying of an incurable disease, the result of an old injury. It was past the operative stage. Matter of months at most. He was in great pain; had to give him morphine constantly. He should have been in a hospital. But you know Barney Nordall. Wouldn't hear of it! Loved the sea, that man, and he wouldn't even tell Ashton and Monise his condition for fear they might not wish to sail with a man who might die any day."

North sat motionless for minutes, his palms damp, his mind conjuring up the picture of that great old Viking dying on his feet, defying the men who would have helped him because their help could only prolong his pain.

And then North's jaw tightened, and he was on his feet, striding toward the door.

"Here!" the doctor cried. "Where are you going?"

North turned, his face now alight. "I'm going to apologize to two damned fine mates before the night's an hour older!"

They were waiting for us—and they shot Pokri just a block from the back of the hotel.

SHIPMENT SEVENTEEN

By ROBINSON MacLEAN

ILLUSTRATED BY JULIAN G. CHAMBERS

SHIPMENT SEVENTEEN was all loused up from the beginning. In the first place we didn't know who the guy really was or why he was important.

In the second place we didn't know who smuggled him out of Poland, or how. And in the third place the Russians knew damn near everything we did.

That was about all Stendahl could tell me before he shipped me out to Port Said to help out the Cairo man. I only had time to stick a toothbrush in my vest, too, because it took so long to get the State Department to fix up the passport for the guy to bring him back on when we found him. It was in the name of Topic. Jan Topic.

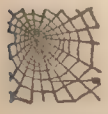
I got there at night. The Ayrab in the taxi gave me a funny look when I told him I wanted to go to the Hotel Grand Khedive. But that's what the Cairo man had said. Hotel Grand Khedive; register under the name Urbanowski. My real name's Dan Woijecki, but that's neither here nor there in our business.

The cab passed through town around by the fueling docks. When it stopped, one running board was outside the hotel, and the other was in front of the Khedive cafe, across the street. That's how narrow the street was.

The cafe was an open-front number, which looked as though they'd run out of material to finish it and the hotel was a two-story plaster job, wedged in between a pair of cement warehouses. The clerk on duty was a greasy little piece about the color of a new saddle. There was a brunette in one of the two chairs in the lobby and you didn't have to guess her occupation.

He spun the book for me and I registered. It was a new page, and there weren't any other names on it, just ditto marks. He wrote 19 after my name and handed me a key. I told him I didn't have any baggage, and he held out his hand. I gave him a five and got back a bunch of Egyptian silver. Then I went up.

It wasn't a bad room. There was a sort of balcony on front, with French doors. The back window opened onto a little courtyard the hotel was built around. There was an arch at the far end of it leading out to the street behind. I turned on the ceiling fan, opened the French doors to get some air, and hung my coat and gun on the wrought-iron hatrack. Then I sat down on the bed and waited for the Cairo man. I realized I didn't know who it was.



IT WAS close to midnight when somebody knocked on the door and I opened it. It was Arthur Vining. Neither of us were too happy at seeing each other.

"So you're handling Cairo, now," I said.

He didn't say anything right away. Just set his suitcase inside the door and took off his coat. In Stendahl's field branch you have to work with whomever they say, but you don't have to like it. Vining used to be a sort of professor—psychology or something. He speaks a handful of languages and he draws beautiful charts analyzing things like petroleum reserve supplies, but I never thought he was much good with people. And he's always needling me about having been a cop. He calls me things like "The Hamtramck Hawkshaw." This time he didn't do any kidding around. He looked worried and he sounded mad.

"To be frank, I'm sorry you came, Woijecki," he said. "I would have preferred almost anyone else. This is a delicate business, and one to which your police training doesn't adapt you. I think perhaps the best thing for you to do is to stay in the room out of sight, and let me try to work it out. I'm sure you'll understand my position."

"I understand it, all right," I told him. "Only thing is Stendahl told me to take charge. I'm afraid we got to work it out that way."

"Is this one of your jokes?" he snapped. "If so, I think it is in questionable taste. Why would Stendahl give you authority over me in my field, on one of my projects?"

"I don't know, Vining," I said. "You could ask him. Maybe it's just because the deadline is so close."

"What deadline?" Vining asked. He's thin, sort of distinguished looking, like that fellow plays butlers in the movies. He was running his hands through the short hair over his ears.

"Look," I told him, "I just got one quick look at the cards. I'm not sure enough of the details to make sense, unless you fill me in. Why don't I send down for a bottle, and you can sit down and brief me on the deal. How did it start?"

He fished into his bag and brought out a pint of brandy. I noticed the bag was neat as a spinster's hope chest. He set the brandy on the table.

"Help yourself if you wish, Woijecki," he said. "I'm sure this will be safer than anything the hotel could supply. I seldom use it except for an occasional sip to induce sleep."

I thanked him, and he perched on the arm of the one big chair. I leaned back and waited for it.

"By the way, do you understand Polish?"

I shook my head. "Only a couple of

words. *Dobra,* and like that. Dad died when I was a kid and mother was Irish."

"Well, you know we've been trying to locate some of the top Polish scientists, men who went underground when the Germans came in and stayed there after the Russians took over?"

I nodded.

"A few of them turned up in different places by different routes. But the first indication of any organized channel came last week. They got word to our man at Istanbul. One of the men we wanted would be delivered to us, here, in this hotel, sometime this week. If he got through safely, they'd tell us where and when to meet the others. If we were able to handle them, we were to have a valid passport ready for immediate travel to America. They said it was to be in the name of Jan Topic, and we were to signal its arrival by registering the name of Urbanowski in this hotel, then wait further action. You brought the passport, didn't you?"

I handed it to him and he looked a little relieved.

"But Stendahl said the Russians knew almost as much as we do. How did that happen?"

He stuck out his open hands.

"Somebody's getting hell for that, now," he said. "Istanbul passed the word along to me. But the message wasn't coded. There was some mixup, and the whole thing got sent in the clear. We don't know that the Russians got it, of course, but we have to assume it."

I wasn't surprised. Things like that happen. Like the time the invasion plans blew out a window of the Pentagon and the whole countryside was covered with generals on their hands and knees chasing old bus transfers or anything else that was paper.

"But what about the deadline?" Vining asked.

I looked at my watch.

"Thirty-six hours," I said. "We got word by way of Paris. They're calling this deal 'Operation Detour'. It's set up from Breslau to Constanta, and from there it changes every time. They're calling this Topic fellow Shipment Seventeen. The next one, Shipment Eighteen, is due to leave Constanta at midnight Wednesday. But they said if we hadn't cleared Topic and sent them word by noon Wednesday, the whole operation was cancelled."

"How do we notify?"

"Fox broadcast. You know, one of those general transmissions to 'All Ships At Sea'. They'll be tuned on it. Stendahl said Cairo was to be informed of the time and band. We're to let the Embassy know what to send. Either 'Shipment Seventeen Received' or 'Cancel Shipment Eighteen'."

WE WERE quiet for a while. Each of the messages was just three words, but there were probably twice as many lives involved. You can't sneak a man across Russian-controlled territory, get him to a port ready to duck out, and then just change your mind and put him back where he was, like nothing happened. There were only two destinations for Shipment Eighteen and the others that would already be underway. It was either U.S.A. or R.I.P. And compared to the deal they faced, my problem was chicken-feed. But Stendahl had made it quite clear.

"We have a lot of brilliant men in the branch," he had told me, while we were waiting for the plane at National airport. "Many of them resent having a former policeman in a position of authority over them. I know you've done good work—but you've got to be better than good. This operation will be in the nature of a test case. If you can handle it, you can handle anything. But I'm afraid any mistakes here will end up with you back in Detroit."

"And you're in charge?" Vining asked.

"And I'm in charge," I said. I reached over his pint and poured myself two fingers of the brandy.

"Thanks," I told him. "Sure you won't join me?"

"Is that a command?" he said.

"Don't take it that way," I said. "Sure, I'm just an ex-cop, without any foreign languages or any education, but I've hunted for people before. That's all you do on Missing Persons. And you generally find them."

"This isn't Hamtramck."

"It's not much bigger. And besides we don't have to go out and dig the guy up. We just wait here for word."

"Very well, Woijecki," he said. "After all, it's Stendahl's decision. Now if you'll excuse me I'll go down and register for a room for myself. I'd like to take a bath and clean up. It was a dusty trip from Cairo."

I fished into my money belt.

"Would you mind doing me a favor?"

He didn't answer, so I just handed him the money.

"Get it changed into Egyptian money, will you?"

"But this is a thousand dollars. I don't imagine the hotel can begin to change this."

This time I didn't answer.

He got my point and blushed. I hadn't told him to get it changed at the hotel. If you're giving an order, anything you don't detail, the guy getting the order is supposed to do—however he thinks best.

The door slammed. I don't usually act that way, but from the way Vining started out I knew I had to make clear who was running this outfit. As long as I kept my head, we could work neat that way. But all I'd have to do was slip . . . just once.

I turned out the light and crossed to the French doors opening out front. If the Russians had picked up the transmission, somebody ought to be staked out in the cafe. It was a good place to put in time, and it covered the front of the hotel like her bathing suit covered grandma.

There were five customers. Two girls, one the brunette who had been in the lobby when I registered, were drinking what could have been iced tea at a middle table. They looked like they might be part of the joint's regular menu. There was a gray man down at one end, reading a newspaper. I couldn't make out the language. A couple of stevedores from the coaling docks were blowing their day's wages with straight shots.

I heard footsteps under me, and saw Vining walk out to the middle of the cobbles and head down the street toward town. From the set of his shoulders and the way he threw out his heels, you could tell he was working out a report to have ready for Stendahl in case I fouled the deal. He hadn't got much past the first corner when one of the girls tucked her cigarettes back in her bag and wandered out. She ambled until she was out of the light from the cafe, then you could hear her heels click into a canter. Nothing else happened. I watched for a while, then went back to the bed and flaked out. I had some thinking to do. And I don't think quick enough to do it on the spur of the moment.

Vining was about half an hour, and the sweat was standing out on his upper lip when he came in. He gave me the money and I laid it on the table. I like to look prosperous if anybody comes to do business. I had the gun handy under the fold of the sheet. That was to make sure the business went my way in case the wrong party showed.

"Is it all right if I bathe now?" he asked. He was getting the point. I felt like telling him to relax, but decided I better keep a good hold of the reins now that I had them.

"What room have you got?" I asked.

He pointed. "Seventeen. Next door."

"O.K., go ahead. I'll knock on the wall if I need you."

You could see him swallowing the things he was thinking. And while he was standing there, there was a knock on the door. He asked me a question with his eyebrows, and I nodded. He opened the door.

It was a little guy. Maybe five six. He had black shoes with points on them sharp enough to kick the eyes out of a kitten—and a face like he might enjoy it.

He shuffled his eyes back and forth between us a couple of times and said, "Urbanowski?", aiming it down the middle.

"Shut the door and come in," I said. "Sit down."

He shut the door, and said something I didn't get.

I looked at Vining.

"No English," Vining said. "Do you wish me to interpret?"

"Please."

Vining riffled off a few sentences in French and the little rat took the chair.

His eyes crawled across the money, over to the red edge of the passport lying on the dresser, and back to me. He was waiting for me to toss the first ball. I let him.

He almost whispered the first two sentences. They were short and slow. He spoke to me, although Vining had to switch them into English and pass them on.

"There is no mistake. The papers are arranged?" Vining said.

"Tell him there's no mistake."

"He asks if one can inspect the document."

"Ask him to mention the name. Not the number. The name."

I didn't need Vining for the next three words. He said "Topic. Jan Topic." Only he pronounced it like it was Topitch.

"Where did he come from?"

Vining asked.

"Breslau," the little man said.

"I meant where did this guy come from. This one, sitting here. What's his name? What's his address? Has he got a card? Most foreigners carry them, I noticed."

IT TOOK Vining a while to make the guy understand. Then he popped up and fished a card out of his breast pocket from behind the silk handkerchief. He was talking a blue streak. I looked at the card while I was waiting for the guy to run down, and Vining to translate it. The card wasn't much. No address. Just the name, in slanting letters. *N. Pokri.*

He finally finished. He kept his eyes on me while Vining gave me the sense of it.

"He says that his name is on the card, but he naturally can't give his address because of the nature of his work. He is a runner for a brothel. There are two Polish girls there, he says, who represent the Port Said end of the organization that is handling the man we're after. They've been instructed not to turn him over to us until they are certain that we have a valid American passport to complete the journey without delay. The Russians have got wind of his presence here, and are offering rather big money to have him delivered to them. The girls wish to be certain that we can fulfill our part of the arrangement before they take further action. They have instructed Pokri to tell us that if we attempt to follow him or otherwise hinder his free return, they will deliver the man to the other side. Is that clear?"

"Tell him it sounds logical, and he can look at the passport. When he's convinced it's authentic we'll arrange the rest."

While Pokri was looking over the passport, even holding the blank pages up to the light to check the watermark, I asked Vining what kind of name Pokri sounded like to him. He said it was just a jumble as far as he was concerned.

Vining was acting almost friendly. I felt better.

The little guy, Pokri, finished with the passport and sat there holding it in both hands.

"Well?" I said.

He spoke without waiting for Vining.

Vining said he wanted to know if he could take the passport to show Topic, and bring him back. He said it was perfect.

I got up off the bed and took the passport away from him. I stuck it in my back hip pocket and buttoned the flap.

"Tell him to come around tomorrow night and we'll decide," I said.

Vining looked as though I'd kicked him. "What the hell, Woijecki. . ." he started.

"Shut up. Tell him."

Pokri didn't like it, either.

Vining had icicles dripping off his voice when he translated.

"He states that his principals, the two girls, have instructed him to remain here until he is able to take back evidence of

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our good faith. He says that he will remain in the lobby, or at the cafe across the street, until such time as we are prepared to supply him with what he requires."

I didn't say anything, and finally Pokri got up, gave a stiff bow and went out. Then Vining lit into me.

"Wait a minute," I told him. I cut the lights and looked out across the street. The stevedores had gone, but the other three were there. They were keeping an eye on the hotel.

The gray man didn't move, but finally one of the girl, the one that had followed Vining when he went out to get the money, paid her bill and went out. She turned the other way this time, toward the harbor. She didn't seem to be in any hurry. Pokri didn't show. He must have stayed in the lobby.

"All right," I told Vining. "Let's hear it." I put the light on.

There was plenty. Here we have the contact we'd been expecting, and I bust it. I seemed to be going out of my way to make sure that we failed to meet the deadline. And Vining would make certain that Stendahl heard how it happened.

I asked Vining how he knew Pokri wasn't a Russian trying to get the passport so he could get Topic away from the girls himself.

"There's nothing whatever to suggest it," Vining said. "Believe me. The man spoke with a perfect Polish accent, and with great sincerity."

"Jeez, can you tell they got a Polish accent even in French?" I asked.

Naturally, he told me.

"There were a couple of things about him I didn't like," I said. "He had a button off his shirt, and he didn't ask for any money."

"And I suppose there is some abstruse psychological interpretation of these remarkable events?" he asked.

"You know much about the type of houses he says he comes from?" I asked. He shook his head.

"The girls got a lot of time, days," I told him. "There's always at least one of them handy with a needle who could fix up the guy's shirt. I never met a guy who does what he says he does without asking for money—if he knew you had it."

Vining didn't say anything.

"There's one other thing," I said.

Vining didn't ask, so I skipped it.

"Here's what we're going to do," I said. "Have you got an envelope?"

He opened his bag and flipped open a folder. The inside was all fixed out like a little writing case. He got an envelope and gave it to me. I slid the passport in the envelope and sealed it.

"Put this in your pocket," I told him. "Go down to the lobby and keep Pokri down there, talking, for at least fifteen minutes. Then tell him you have the passport and you'll go with him to deliver it."

"What makes you think he'll agree?"

"I think he will. But don't go out by the front way. Come back through the hotel into the courtyard and out that arch into the back street. There're people in the cafe across the street paying too much attention to what's going on."

"Anything further?"

"Yeah. Leave your gun here. They'd probably take it away at the place this guy is before they'd let you come in. There's no sense losing a good gun."

He shrugged and tossed it on the bed.

"I presume you will permit me to use what few brains I have left from then on," he said.

I told him sure, and not to worry too much.

"I wish that were possible," he said. "Very well. If you have no further instructions I shall proceed. You understand that I disagree completely."

I TOLD HIM I understood. He went out. I took another drink. I was going to need it.

Then I put on my coat and went out, too. I had a little business to attend to. I didn't want to get mixed up with Vining and Pokri, still talking in the lobby, so I went out the back way.

It was half an hour before Vining got back to the room. His face was white, and he was so mad there were tears in his eyes.

"I hope you're satisfied, Woijecki," he said. "You've killed perhaps a dozen men with tonight's stupidity."

"Maybe it isn't that bad," I said. "What happened?"

"They were waiting for us," he said. "They shot Pokri just a block from the back of the hotel. And I didn't even have a gun."

"I haven't heard any police cars," I said.

"I don't suppose they'll find him until morning," he said. "There was just one shot from the loading shed of a warehouse. I. . . I didn't have a gun." He sat down on the bed and put his face down in his hands.

"Don't take it too hard," I told him. "Maybe we can get in touch with these girls, even without him. Anybody see you leave?"

He said no, he'd been careful.

"I suppose we might as well cancel Shipment Eighteen," he said. I told him we could wait till morning.

"You say you might still be able to get in touch with these girls," he said. "How do you imagine you can do that."

"The same as I'd do it in Hamtramck," I told him. "Most of the professionals know each other. I'll just put the word out, and I imagine we'll hear."

"But will it be in time?" he asked.

I was liking the guy better all the time.

"We've got to take that chance," I said. "Look, will you do something for me?"

He nodded. He was wiping his face with his handkerchief.

"This may seem silly, but I have a reason," I told him. "Look. Take this Egyptian money out and get it changed back into American."

"If you say so," he said. "You know I'm going to have to tell Stendahl you ruined this whole arrangement?"

"After noon tomorrow, you do whatever you please," I said. "You may have to go down to one of the big hotels to get this money changed back. But take your time. And if one place can't change all of it, try a couple of others."

He crossed to the washbasin and ran some cold water over his face and combed out his hair.

"I'll follow orders," he said.

I watched from the French doors and saw him go. The same girl eased out after him. Then nothing happened for a little while. Then the gray man put down his paper, paid his bill, and walked out in the same general direction. The other girl, the brunette, got up, too. Only she came toward the hotel.

I had the door open, waiting.

She walked straight in and shut it quick behind her. She was about thirty-five, my age, and her legs had started to get a little thick, but she was neat-looking and seemed to have a kind of nice face under the professional finish.

"Urbanowski?" she said.

"*Dobra.* I hope to God you speak English."

She asked me if I couldn't speak *Polska.* I shook my head.

That made it tough, but she had a few words of English, and the main part didn't need any words. Altogether, I'd say, it took about twenty, twenty-five minutes. But there was lots of time. Vining didn't get back until just about dawn.

He was a hostile citizen. He slapped the money on the dresser. "You lost a hundred and fifteen dollars on that transaction," he said. "It's harder to buy American money than sell it. Now with your imperial permission I'm going to bed until you need me."

"That'll be fine," I said. "Look, if you want this room, there's a pretty good breeze through here."

"I'd prefer to sleep in my own bed."

I told him O.K. "I'll wake you," I said. "But if I were you I wouldn't go to sleep just yet. I imagine the police will be along through here any minute now."

"What makes you think that?"

"It's getting light. They'll find the guy. They'll run through places like this."

He thought about it for a minute.

"You had better give me both guns," he said. "I have a card from the authorities at Cairo for mine. I'll probably be able to make some kind of explanation for yours."

I told him not to bother. I was checking out.

"Where shall I meet you?" he asked.

"Say the airport, a little before ten."

He thought about it, agreed, took his bag and went to his room. I went out. I didn't bother telling the clerk I wouldn't be back. I left a call for Vining.

I found a place open all night and got a double bourbon. I nursed it for about an hour, then took a walk. It was a little after nine when I got to the airport. The jockeys had a twin-engine plane out on the ramp, fueling it. It had a kind of funny name: *Misr.*

Vining got there after about fifteen minutes.

"Police come?" I asked him.

"They came," he said. He didn't feel like talking.

"Do you mind if I go in and sit down?" he asked. "I didn't get any sleep."

I fished a pint of brandy out of my pocket. "This is the best I could do," I told him. "Have a drink."

He gave me a dirty look.

"I suppose that this time it is an order."

"That's right."

He took a swallow. "Now may I sit down?"

"Stick around. I think you'll find it interesting."

I could see a heavy sedan twisting up a squirrel-tail of sand along the road from town. Again I hoped to God I was right.

It sort of felt its way along the parking, then stopped. The girl came over. She looked kind of pleased.

"Dobra?" she said.

"Dobra," I told her, and laughed.

Vining just stood there.

"You can speak Polish, can't you?" I asked him. He nodded.

"Would you ask the lady her name?"

It was Anna something. I forget. We got introduced all around, then she ran back to the sedan. She opened the door and a little fellow got out. At least he looked little, the way he was stooped. He was white-haired and kind of shaky. Anna helped him.

"Hey, do you know who that is?" Vining asked me. "Dr. Dubic. You know—the one that . . ."

"There'll be time for that later," I said. "Look, let's get him aboard."

He hugged the girl, and his eyes were wet. He still had lipstick on the white hair over his ears when we got our seats.

"Do you mind if I talk to him for a while, Dan?" Vining asked.

"You're the boss," I told him. "I got to send a wire. That finishes my end of the deal."

THEY were jabbering away fifteen to the dozen when I asked the steward if he could hold the plane for a minute and scribbled out a wire to the Embassy to tell the ships at sea that Shipment Seventeen had arrived. When I got back, the old man was dozing and Vining was waiting for me in a back seat.

"Sit down, you rat," he said. He had as much smile as his thin face would hold. Then he added, "I admit in advance that I'm a dolt—but for heaven's sake tell me what happened."

I couldn't help rubbing it in a little.

"It was the Hamtramck Special," I told him. "Lesson Seventeen in Missing Persons."

"O. K.," he said. "O. K. I deserve it. Now tell me why."

"Most of it was right out on the table," I told him. "I admit I soft-pedalled a couple of things, but you ought to have been watching for them."

"Now look," he said. "Just start at the beginning and print it all out in capital letters. I've admitted I'm back in kindergarten."

"O. K., Arthur. Listen. What was the key to this whole business?"

"The passport, I suppose," he said.

"And what's a passport?"

"It's a book, guaranteed by the United States which authorizes and identifies the bearer. It has a picture, a description, a signature, a seal, and a lot of blank pages for visas."

"When did you first lay eyes on the man who was to use the passport—the Jan Topic passport?"

"Just a few minutes ago when he got on the plane. I begin to see what you mean. The passport had to have a picture, but we didn't have the picture because we didn't know who it would be. I suppose when you first got the passport you just stuck somebody else's picture into it for the time being."

"That's right. Now there were two groups of people involved. The Russians and this Polish group, whoever they are. Remember the Russians knew almost everything we knew—but they didn't know what we didn't know."

"I don't get it."

"Suppose Pokri was Russian Intelligence. Suppose he was telling the truth when he said the old fellow, Topic or Dubic or whatever his name is, was being hidden out by the girls in a house. What was there to prevent his telling them he was U. S. Intelligence and picking up the old man himself?"

Vining thought it over a minute.

"The passport," he said. "I suppose that's why the Poles insisted we produce the passport before they turned him over."

"So what would he do next? He'd be waiting for us to check in and try to get

his hands on the passport. That right?"

Vining nodded, but said, "But how could you be sure he was Russian? There was nothing to show it except the button and not asking for the money. And that is hardly unquestionable truth."

"The picture," I said. "If he was telling the truth and was sent out from the place they were hiding Dubic, he'd say something about needing a new picture before the old man could use it."

"I didn't look at the picture," Vining admitted.

"I did. I had to dig one up to put in it. And Pokri looked at it. Carefully. But it didn't look anything like the old professor here. It was a younger man with black hair and big handlebar mustaches. It was the only picture I could find that was the right size and looked Polish. It happened to be a picture of my father.

"Now when I showed Anna the passport while you were out changing money, the first thing she said was that the picture was no good. I told her we'd change it in Cairo."

"Then why did the Russians shoot Pokri?"

"They didn't. You see, Pokri went out of the hotel with you with the intention of shooting you down by the waterfront, and taking the passport away so that he could get Dubic from where he'd learned he was hidden."

"How do you know that?"

"Did you look at him, after they shot him?"

"Yes."

"Did he have a gun in his hand?"

"Yes, but he could have. . . . No, I guess he couldn't. He was killed instantly. He wouldn't have time to. . . . Look, where's my gun?"

"Off the edge of the coal dock in about twenty feet of water," I told him. "I figured it was safer that way. You're right. I shot him. I was behind you when you went out into the back street. But I waited until he got his gun out. You were about four steps away from your coffin."

Vining reflected a little.

"Thanks, Dan," he said. "I should have been watching."

"You were pretty mad," I reminded him. "I was being rough."

"You're damn right you were," he said. "Look, what was that business about getting the money changed again. Was that a gag?"

"From your end," I told him. "But it was awfully useful. Pokri had a partner, a little gray man, watching from across the street. And the girls, Anna and her friend, were watching too. They just saw you talking to Pokri in the lobby, and I couldn't be sure they wouldn't be afraid to come in while you were still around. But two of them followed you—the gray man, and the girl. That left the coast clear so I could give Anna the Topic passport and tell her to deliver the old man to the airport this morning. We had to use sign language, but the passport did most of the talking."

Vining thought it over. Then he grinned. "You're a liar. You gave me the Topic passport, just before I went out with Pokri. I've got it right here." He fished in his pocket and brought out the envelope. It was still sealed.

"Want to bet?" I asked him.

"No. But I saw you put a passport in here. Where did it come from?"

He was opening it as he talked.

"From my hip pocket," I told him. "I think you'll find it has the name Woijecki on it. I had to pull a switch because I wanted to have the Topic passport ready whenever the Poles turned up."

"Where's the other one—the Topic one?"

"The professor's got it," I said. "And I'll give you twenty for two it's fastened over his heart onto his long underwear with a safety pin. We have to get it back from him at Cairo and get his own picture taken to put in."

Arthur watched the old man for a few minutes, and his face was gentle. He reached over and we shook hands.

"Thanks, Dan," he said. "I think I'm learning. I know a fellow in Cairo who can steam the other picture off without leaving a mark on it. I imagine you'll want your father's picture back."

"It's the only one I got," I told him. "Pop'd be around that age, I guess. Say, there's something you can tell me. What's this *Misr* mean they have painted on the side of the plane?"

"Just means 'Egypt' ", he told me. "It's the name of the country in their language."

"I'll be damned," I said. And I probably will.

ILLUSTRATED BY PETER KUHLHOFF

THE RUINATION OF

"Ya! Ya! Poky's whipped him!" I yelled at Cutter. And Pud hollered, "Shut up!" and busted me in the nose.

By FRED GIPSON

RESTLESS SOLOMON

I'M GROWN now and the blade of my conscience is dulled. But it can still cut deep whenever I think of what I did to Restless Solomon.

I was ten the fall that Restless rented the old Sub Felder place and declared he was settling down for good.

"My drifting days is done," he told Papa the day he asked for a wagon-load of corn to see him through till cropgathering time next fall. "A rolling rock don't pick up no moss. A man's got to light and stick if he ever aims to get ahead. Like you and your woman done. That's the only way."

Papa looked skeptical. He mentioned to Restless that the old Sub Felder place was a starve-out proposition. "The last couple or three renters had a mighty hard go of it there," he said.

But Restless wasn't to be discouraged. "They never worked that land like I aim to work it," he said. "Get a bait of corn in that work team of mine and I'll rip the guts out of that sand. Have that old place blooming like the Garden of Eden!"

Papa still didn't look convinced, but he let Restless have the corn—and then had to listen to the jeers of all our neighbors.

"That's corn throwed to the birds," Slim Huxton declared to Papa. "A man couldn't grow a wagon-load of whirlwind nubbins on that old place. Anyhow, first time the sun burns Restless' back next summer, he'll pull out for the river to catfish in the shade. When the weeds start sprouting, you couldn't tie that itchy-footed drifter to a drag big enough to hold him in a field."

Nobody else along Wolf Branch seemed to have any faith in Restless' sticking to farming, either. He liked to move about too much. He'd thrash pecans in the fall, dog-hunt for furs in the winter, maybe chop a little cotton in the spring, then spend most of the summer along the Llano River, fishing and diving for fresh-water pearls. Ike Savage declared that Restless and his little dried-up woman moved so regular that every Monday morning their chickens quit the roost with their legs crossed, ready to be tied up and loaded into the wagon.

BUT I liked Restless. I believed in him. He'd talk to a boy like he would to a man. He had good hunting dogs and good hunting yarns to tell. And around the fire of a winter night, he'd play his fiddle music so pretty it made the tears come, and I'd have to hold back hard to keep from crying out loud, like the hounds that lay under the house.

Besides, it was Restless who gave me the pet possum.

Later, I wished a thousand times that he hadn't; that possum brought on the ruination of Restless. But right then I was busting proud and grateful. Mama and Papa always said pet varmints were too much aggravation to keep, but Restless talked them into letting me keep the possum.

"A boy needs something to pet," he told them. "He don't grow up natural without it."

The possum was no bigger than a corn-crib rat when Restless brought it to me out of the woods that fall—mighty little for that season of the year. But he tamed easy and was a hearty eater and soon got fat and sassy.

I fed him from an old cast-iron skillet. I bedded him in an apple box. It was sure a pleasure to watch him gather dry grass to make his bed soft inside the box. But once the job was done, he didn't sleep in it much. Most of the time he'd come and crawl in bed with me and I'd have to get up mighty early the next morning to keep Mama from catching him at it. But it was worth it, just to have something warm and soft and alive to snuggle up to in bed. I called him Poky.

Other than the times he knocked off a few days for varmint hunting or took to the woods after a bait of venison, Restless stuck to his farming that winter as close as any man on Wolf Branch. Day after day, he followed the middle buster he'd borrowed from Papa, singing and whistling lonesome songs or shouting silly things at the dun mule and rawboned bay horse hitched to the plow. I could hear him 'way up to our house. "Git along there, mule!" he'd holler. "Lay yore belly to the ground and crawl up in that collar. . . . You bay hoss! Squat and reach for it there. We got us a crop to put in!" Having the best time on earth, seemed like. And when spring came, he was the first man to get his seed into the ground.

Papa was impressed and remarked to Slim Huxton that maybe Restless was serious about settling down and making a crop. But Slim wouldn't believe it yet. "You wait," he said. "The sun ain't got hot yet!"

But the crop came up and the sun got hot and still Restless didn't weaken. He

was up early every morning and out in his crop, plowing or weed-hoeing or thinning his cotton.

He came up to the house regular to borrow tools or talk over crop prospects or just to have a look at Poky. He took a big interest in the possum and got a good laugh out of the way me and Poky were putting one over on Mama.

What tickled us both nearly to death, though, was the way old Poky jumped on one of the hounds one day. Restless came up, followed by a hound, just as I was feeding Poky some table scraps. The hound rushed Poky with a growl, aiming to rob him. But Poky had been pampered and spoiled too long. He forgot he was a possum, supposed to fall over and play dead. He jumped right up in the middle of that old hound and had him half eaten up before the dog knew what was happening.

You never saw a worse surprised dog. He'd never seen a possum fight back before; he didn't know what to make of it.

After that, Poky was always ready to fight anything that came around him while he was eating. Once he even bit one of Papa's mules that came nosing around him.

I was sure proud of the way he'd fight and one day in town I got to bragging to the Sessum twins about how he would scrap a dog or anything else. They didn't want to believe me.

Cutter said, "We got an old brindle tomcat he won't jump on!"

His brother Pud added, "If he does, he'll sure wish he hadn't. Old Brindle will clean his plows for him."

Restless Solomon was standing close by. He heard us talking and put in. "If that's how you figure it," he told Pud and Cutter, "why don't you bring yore brindle cat over for a try. Me'n Little Jim here, we're ready to match that Poky possum agin ary tomcat that ever lived!"

Quick as a wink, Restless matched a fight for Poky against the Sessum twins' tomcat to be held at Restless' house that night. When the twins left, I turned to Restless. "You reckon old Poky's got a chance against a big tomcat?" I asked nervously.

"You wait!" Restless said confidently. "Poky'll make scrap meat out of that tomcat!"

I sure did hope so. I didn't have much use for the Sessum twins. Any time you got into a fuss with one, you had them both to whip.

I CARRIED Poky down to Restless' cabin right after supper, taking along the skillet he ate out of and a pan full of table scraps. When I got there, I found Restless and his woman fixing to drive off in their rattle-trap wagon.

"I'm sure put out with myself," Restless apologized. "But I clean forgot I promised to fiddle for Dude Creech's wedding tonight. Guess I'll be forced to miss out on that cat and possum fight."

He climbed up into the wagon seat and motioned toward the house. "Now, you boys just make yourselves to home," he said generously. "I've left a lamp burning in the shed room and got everything else cleaned out. It'll be the ideal place to hold the fight. Lordy, but I'd love to see old Poky tie into that tomcat!"

He drove off down the sandy lane, with his hound-dogs following. I went into the shed room where a coal oil lamp sat on a rickety table. I put Poky on the floor and sat down on a steel frame cot covered with ragged quilts. I waited for the Sessum twins and wished my folks were free and easy-going like Restless. But, shoot! You'd never get them to turn over a room in a house for a cat and possum fight.

Pud and Cutter finally came, toting their brindle tomcat in a sack. They dumped the sack in the middle of the floor and I heard the cat growl savagely. I told Pud and Cutter where Restless had gone, but that we could go right ahead in his house without him.

"All right," Cutter said eagerly. "Start feeding your possum while I turn out old Brindle!"

I put the skillet in the corner of the room and emptied the table scraps into it. Poky came down off the cot and started eating. Pud went around shutting all the doors and windows.

"That's so your possum can't run off and get away the first time old Brindle makes a pass at him," he said.

Cutter grinned and pulled the sack open. A big brindle housecat walked out into the middle of the floor, growling as he came. Sight of him scared me a little.

He sure was a big one. I sort of wished now that I hadn't let Restless match Poky for a fight. I didn't want to get Poky killed.

The tomcat scented the table scraps Poky was eating on and started walking toward him, his back arched and his tail all fuzzed up. Poky kept on eating. If he even knew the cat was in the room, he didn't give any sign. I felt my heart jump up and start beating fast.

Suddenly, the cat let out a squall and sprang, landing right on Poky's back, biting and clawing, knocking him to the floor. Poky squalled too, surprised, I guess. Then they mixed it, snarling and clawing and biting and rolling over and over across the floor. They sure had the fur flying.

I hopped up and down, screaming for Poky to kill the brindle tomcat. The Sessum twins hopped up and down, screaming for Brindle to kill the possum.

The cat could fight faster than Poky, but I guess he couldn't bite as hard, because in just a little bit the cat tore loose from Poky and started circling the room, hunting a way out. He was fuzzed up all over now and acting crazy wild, squalling at the top of his voice.

"Ya! Ya! Poky's whipped him!" I yelled at Cutter. And Pud hollered, "Shut up!" and busted me in the nose. I felt the blood come and busted him right back. And then Cutter was on top of me, screaming mad and hammering my head with his fists, while Pud caught one of my hands and started dragging me down.

We piled up in the middle of the floor with a crash and then there was a second crash and the sound of shattering glass. A great flash of light filled the room and the reeking choking scent of burning coal oil stifled me. Cutter rolled off my back, yelling, "Fire! Fire!"

I kicked Pud in the mouth and came to my feet. The whole room was afire it seemed like. Me and the Sessum twins, or maybe it was Poky and the tomcat, had knocked the lamp off the table and broken it, scattering the coal oil which had caught fire.

For a second, we were all too stunned to do anything. We just stood and stared while a little river of flames crawled under the cot and set fire to the ragged bed quilts. Then the squalling cat leaped right through the fire, scorching his hair till yellow smoke boiled up. He leaped up the side of a bare wall and climbed it a piece before he fell back to the floor.

I made for the door and flung it open, screaming, "Water! We got to get some water."

THE scorched tomcat shot between my legs as I went through the door. Cutter and Pud followed me out, Cutter hollering, "You get a bucket while I draw the water!"

I heard the squeal of the well pulley while I floundered around in the dark on Restless' back gallery, hunting a bucket. By accident, I found one. Cutter filled it from the well bucket. Pud snatched it away from me and ran to the shed room door. Swinging the bucket high, he dashed the water into the fire. All that seemed to do was make the smoke boil up and the flames spread and leap higher.

We didn't know about pouring water on an oil fire, so we poured bucket after bucket into the room till the fire was all over it and climbing the walls. Then we tore out in terror for my house, screaming for Papa!

Behind us, the flames started spurting up through the cracked shingles, making a wild red light in the night. . . .

The neighbors were all gathered around the smoldering ruins of the cabin, shaking their heads, when Restless and his woman drove up. Restless sat there in the spring seat for a moment without saying a word, then climbed to the ground. He met the stares of the silent crowd and in the glow of the dying fire, I saw his face take on the solemn look you'd expect to see on a man's face at a time like this.

"We'll try to make this right, Restless," Papa said in a hoarse voice. "Me and Pewter. Our kids is responsible and we'll do all we can to make it right."

Restless said in a woebegone voice, like he was talking to himself, "Burnt out and ruint. Nary a thing left to make a new start with. Forced to pull up stakes and go on the drift again!"

Papa's face got white. Pewter Sessums said, "Why, there ain't no call for you folks to leave Wolf Branch. Me'n Big Jim, here, we can put you folks up till your crop is made and gathered."

Restless stood and studied on that a minute. "No," he said, shaking his head. "We'll hit the road again and try to make out somehow. Ain't no use in hanging on when you're done beat. Don't reckon it was meant for me and mine to have nothing like other folks."

He sucked in a deep breath and let it out in a shuddering gust. "But it's pure hard," he added in a hopeless voice, "having to drive off and leave my crop. Prettiest prospects in the country!"

He lifted sad eyes to look at Papa. Papa looked at Pewter Sessum. Pewter stared down at the ground and said, "What do you figure your prospects is worth, Restless?"

"Why," Restless said, leaning his head back to stare up at the stars, "you can't hardly set a right price on a thing like that, something a man's put his soul into and staked his whole future on."

Before daylight, Papa and Pewter Sessum had bought out Restless' prospects for five hundred dollars cash. Slim Huxton said at the time they were paying two hundred more than it was worth. And he was right. Papa and Pewter worked it the rest of the year and then just got three hundred for it.

The neighbors loaded Restless' rattletrap wagon with sacks of corn, bed quilts, canned goods, chairs and clothes, till, according to Slim, it was piled twice as high as it had been when Restless and his woman moved in. Restless accepted the gifts with dignity and solemn thanks.

Just before he started to drive off, Restless came to where I stood leaning against a big tree, holding Poky in my arms.

"How'd the fight come out?" he whispered, rubbing Poky's singed hair.

"All right, I guess," I said nervously. After setting fire to his house like that, I couldn't bring myself to look him in the face.

"I knowed it would!" he said. "I knowed all time old Poky would eat that tomcat alive!"

I looked up, surprised. Restless seemed all excited. He didn't show to be put out with me at all. "Man, I wish I could a-been there to see it!" he said.

For a second, I could have sworn Restless was ready to bust out laughing. But just then Slim Huxton walked up, and I guessed I'd been wrong. Because Restless drew his face into long sober lines again and walked back toward the wagon, slow and tired-like, slumping his shoulders and dragging his feet—just the way you'd expect a man to walk when he's lost everything and is forced to go on the drift again.

I sure felt guilty about bringing down all that ruination on the best friend I guessed I'd ever have.

LOVE LETTER OF A LUMBERJACK

By Harold Willard Gleason

Deer kid:

I got a new ax, double-bitted.
I keep her keen, I grind her good, I'll say.
Our bull-cook and cookee are simple-witted;
They feed us black been-swagan every day.
The crew up here is lousy sons of witches,
And camp's so snug we hafto sleep cross-piled;
You hafto wait all night to scratch what itches.
Two solid quarts of jake don't git me biled.
It's all big pine we've tooken from this cuttin'—
There ain't no fiddlestuff in this here stand.
We got a coon in camp that fights by buttin'.
Boy, Bangor's goin' to holler when we land!
Three hosses has the colic; two is lame.
Black flies is hell.

Here's hopin' you're the same—

By ALEXANDER WALLACE

RED IVORY

ILLUSTRATED BY ROGER L. THOMAS

THOUGH there had been many a hard bargain, when neither black man nor white man would yield, by nightfall most of the caravan had passed through the compound. Estevao Lorente surveyed the piles of coffee-brown tusks and pronounced it all prime ivory.

"A small fortune, *senhor!*" said he, speaking to the tall, young white man who stood beside him with a book and pencil in his hand.

"But not for us, eh?" he added with a gleam in his small, black eyes. "You see what it is! Holy saints, if I had my youth again, I would sooner go to hell than come to Mlululka!"

Eric Marshall wiped sweat from the inside band of his topee. He saw what it was, all right! He felt it in his aching back and limbs. They'd been at it from early dawn, measuring out bolts of bleached and unbleached calico; bundles of copper wire and beads by the ton—all amid a frenzied turmoil of stinking humanity; dust and heat that was like a blast furnace. What made it worse was that he knew he was not going to get along with Estevao Lorente. The Portuguese had a hair-trigger temper and his bald head, inflamed by the African sun, beady eyes and hooked nose gave him a

The headman's hand flew to his machete but before he could get it clear of his loincloth, Lorente's gun roared.

predatory look that reminded Marshall of a bald-headed eagle. Moreover, he had been warned against Lorente's blind fits of rage, before he had left the coast two months ago. Lorente was about through as senior agent at Mluluka, according to Mendos, Chief Factor of the *Companhia do Nyassa.*

"Your record is good here," Mendos had said. "But the coast is one thing ; the interior is another. I warn you that Mluluka will make you or break you! This man Lorente is what you Americans would call a filibuster of the old school. Watch him, *senhor.* And above all, watch his accounts!"

That Mendos suspected that Lorente was trading with the Company's goods on his own account was plain enough. Certainly there was much in Lorente's talk to justify that suspicion. From the first day of his arrival at Mluluka, it seemed to Marshall that Lorente had been sounding him out—probing him with dark suggestive hints and weighing his answers.

"What does your book say?" asked Lorente.

"Nineteen thousand fraslas so far, *senhor,*" Marshall answered. "Taking the frasla at seven pounds sterling, we should show a profit of thirteen thousand, three hundred pounds!"

Lorente shook his head and squinted at Marshall in his queer, speculative way.

"Sometimes I ask myself why I do this thing. Why do I, Estevao Lorente, one-time free trader and leader of caravans, rot in this filth and sweat to make rich men richer! In the old days, it was different. A man took out his own caravan. He went out after his ivory; he did not sit and wait for it to come to him. Perhaps his caravan would be attacked and he would lose everything, even his life. Perhaps he would return with a fortune—*in sha Allah,* as the Arabs say. Ah, *senhor,* those were the days!"

Marshall smiled. "Well, you're still working for wages; they can't have been so good for you."

"Oh, you may laugh! But I tell you just ten years ago we went into the Kosangos country with a caravan of two hundred guns, myself and an Arab, Bushir bin Habib. We fought with the Kosangos twice and defeated them. In three months we took three thousand fraslas of ivory. What do you say to that?"

"The Kosango country—you're not far from your old stamping ground, *senhor.* Well, what happened? You didn't get that ivory to the coast."

"No, we did not. On the way home the Kosangos avenged themselves. They ambushed us and we were cut down almost to a man; only I and three others escaped. Bushir bin Habib and his people died there." He pointed to the piled tusks.

"There may be some of the ivory I lost. If I was buying my own ivory for that fat swine, Mendos, it would amuse you, eh? A good joke, eh, *senhor?*" His eyes challenged Marshall.

"I don't see it," said Marshall evenly.

"Well, that is a good thing, *senhor.*" He gave Marshall a meaning look. "No one makes a fool of Estevao Lorente," he finished and strode off toward the bungalow that faced the open gates across the compound.

MARSHALL'S eyes followed the gaunt Portuguese for a moment, then he hitched up his gun-belt, shrugged and went to make the rounds of the post before locking the gates for the night.

The blacks of the caravan had spread themselves in groups over the surface of the clearing along the bank of the river, and where each group squatted the light of their fires quickly twinkled. The leading men were taken into huts within the compound where the Yao boys attached to the post slept. Marshall left word with them that when they had finished their "chop" they were to re-assemble in the big room of the white man's house where they would be given whatever they chose to drink.

An hour later they walked into the room and squatted in a circle. They were a grotesque-looking set of men as the lamplight shone upon their dark skins, sparkling on the metal bangles and necklets, and on the blades of their knives and machetes stuck in newly-purchased multicolored loincloths.

They were about twenty in number. Some of the men of lesser importance remained on the veranda and peered in at the doorway. Some were tall and well-featured, others stunted, strong and hid-

eous. All wore their woolly hair skewered and twisted into fantastic knots and greased with a pomade of rancid palm oil and fat, too generously applied. A few had never seen the inside of a white man's house before and their eyes rolled in astonishment. Marshall poured the drinks while Lorente lounged in a chair, watching. The liquor went down leathery throats with a gurgle and a gasp. A tall fellow rose amid the shouts of his comrades and made a speech in his native dialect, thanking the white men. Then another arose and another, until all, inspired by the drink would speak at the same time. Among them, a small man hitherto hidden by the shadow of the table, jumped up. The uproar increased at the sight of him. But in his determination to be heard, the muscular little fellow was not to be balked. He threw up his hands and roared at the top of his voice.

As he did so Lorente sprang to his feet with an exclamation. He walked up to the native and stood staring at a crescent-shaped ornament that hung from a thong about the man's neck. The whole gathering was surprised into silence. Then Lorente reached out his hand to grasp the trinket, but the native drew back quickly. With an oath Lorente caught him by the hair and jerked him forward, striking the little fellow with his fist at the same time. In a moment the room was filled with shouts of astonishment and anger.

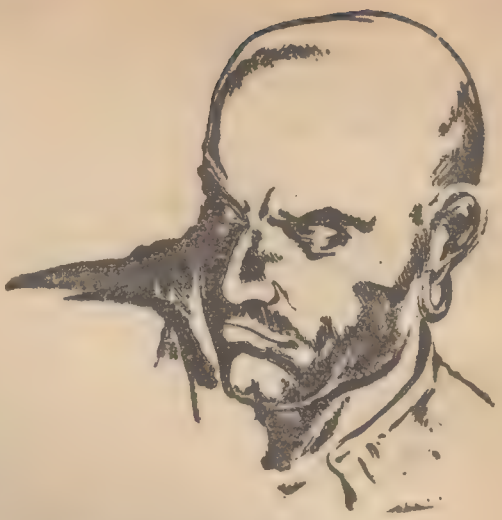
Marshall thrust himself between the two; his powerful hand clamped onto Lorente's wrist and twisting it, forced him to release his hold upon the other's kinky hair.

"You fool!" he hissed, as he forced the Portuguese backwards. "D'you want to get us knifed? *Kwenda sana!* Get out!" he shouted over his shoulder at the natives who were silent now and staring at the struggling white men with fear in their big eyes.

"Blast you! I want that—" Lorente choked with rage, and struggled to draw the hog-leg revolver he always wore. Marshall caught his arm and brought it up behind his back.

"All right, buy it in the morning," he cried. "But get 'em out of there now!"

Lorente ceased to struggle suddenly and Marshall released him. When the last of



"No one makes a fool of Estevao Lorente," the Portuguese said.

the blacks had been gently eased out and the door shut, Lorente turned on Marshall. "I do not like to be man-handled, *senhor!*" said he in a voice that shook with anger.

"I'm sorry," said Marshall. "But damn it, man, you know better than to do a thing like that! The fellow would have given it to you for a pinch of salt. What do you want the damned bauble for, anyway?"

Lorente considered him, his mind evidently busy behind half-closed eyes. Then, suddenly he laughed.

"You are right, my friend! It is nerves, the madness that comes to all of us who have lived alone too long. It will come to you, my young friend, when you take over this post. Oh, yes, I know why they sent you here! At first—I am frank, you see—I did not like it. But now I think it will be good to go home, to know a woman whose skin is not black! This little trouble—it is nothing. Put it out of your mind, *senhor.*"

Marshall grinned. "Can't remember a thing," said he. "Worst memory in Africa!"

"Good! Let us drink to it, *senhor.* The sooner you are fit to take over, the sooner I can go. Tomorrow I will let you bargain for the rest of the ivory alone. That is the best way to learn."

ON THE following morning Marshall was out in the compound early, weighing tusks in the big balance. There was shouting and stamping all around him, muttered threats of dissatisfaction and the thud of the butt ends of spears on the hard ground. Now and then a roar of laughter would go around the circle of sweating bodies as Marshall restored good humor with a timely jest. He had just started to work on the loquacious little headman's pile when Lorente came out and forced his way through the press of naked bodies.

"You are not sounding those tusks, *senhor,*" said he after he had watched for a while.

"Huh?" Marshall looked puzzled as he straightened up. "Sounding them?"

"The devil, yes! Did they teach you nothing at the coast?" He took a thin iron rod from a bracket on the post of the balance. "Sometimes they try to cheat us, *senhor.* They fill the hole with lead to gain weight. An experienced man can tell by the look of a tusk, but for the 'first-timer' the rod is the only way. There is something wrong with the tusk you are weighing. The balance says sixty-five pounds but it looks like forty. See now!" He thrust the rod into the hollow pulp cavity of the tusk. "Aha! Feel it, *senhor!* Feel it!"

Marshall took the rod and sounded the cavity. "Well, I'm damned!" said he. "It's loaded and that's a fact!"

Lorente looked around the circle of jabbering blacks, his eyes snapping with anger. "Whose ivory is this?" he demanded in Swahili.

The little headman with the crescent ornament stepped forward, gesticulating and protesting in a loud voice.

"Son of a dog!" Lorente silenced him. "Would you cheat *me?* Have you not heard how I punish thieves?"

The headman's eyes glowed at the insult. He drew himself up proudly. "I know nothing of this thing, *Bwana.* A Kosango—"

"You lie!" Lorente stormed at him. "You are the son of a hyena! A thief!"

"No, *Bwana!*" The headman stamped his feet in anger. "I am no thief! You lie—"

A blow from Lorente staggered him, and his hand flew to his machete. Before he could get it clear of his loincloth, Lorente's gun roared. The black whirled around and fell on his face.

It had happened so quickly and unexpectedly that Marshall was still staring in bewilderment when Lorente said, "You saw him draw his machete!"

"Sure, I saw that, but—"

The rest of the blacks were backing away from the two white men. Then suddenly they whirled around and made a dash for the gates of the compound.

"We will do no more trading until they quiet down, *senhor,*" said Lorente. "Bar the gate!"

Marshall was bending over the headman and did not answer. The black was still breathing, but the heavy slug had ripped through the muscle just under the left shoulder.

"Did you not hear me, *senhor?*" Lorente's voice rasped in Marshall's ears.

Marshall straightened up and looked steadily into the other's face. "Just why did you shoot that poor devil?" he asked.

The muzzle of Lorente's gun swung on Marshall. "Before you take over this post there are a few things you must learn, my friend. If a native talks back to you, flog him. If he puts his hand on a weapon, shoot him. Another thing—while I am here, you will obey me. Bar the gates!"

For a moment the two men looked into each other's eyes. Lorente's head was thrust forward, his beak of a nose emphasizing his look of menace. A faint smile turned the corners of Marshall's mouth.

"I see what you mean," said he, and went to close the gates.

When he came back across the compound the body of the headman had been removed. Marshall went into the bungalow. Lorente was lounging in his chair, drinking gin.

"Where did the boys put that fellow?" Marshall asked.

"In one of the huts. He will die at sundown. They always do."

Marshall went to the big medicine chest that stood over against the wall. He took out his own first-aid kit. "I'll see what I can do for him."

Lorente rose and went to stand in the doorway. "I will attend to that, *senhor!*"

Marshall put the case down with deliberation and stood considering Lorente

thoughtfully a moment before he said, "I'm not a doctor, but I was studying to be one before I left home. I'm going to do what I can for that boy."

"So!" Lorente spat. "Just now I told you that I give orders here!" His hand went to his holster, then he froze and his jaw sagged. "Holy saints!" he gasped and stared at Marshall.

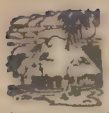
Marshall's colt had flashed from its holster into his hand as if by magic. Its muzzle pointed skyward and the light glinting on its bright metal was reflected in Marshall's eyes.

"Any cowhand where I come from could teach you gunplay, *senhor*," said he calmly. "Maybe you've got a wrong impression. I am kind of slow. I like to think things out. I don't like the way you blasted that black. Seems to me you were looking for trouble with him. Better get rid of that gun, *senhor*. If I see you wearing it again, I'll take it to mean that you want to shoot it out."

The Colt spun on Marshall's finger and plopped snugly back into its holster. He picked up his case and walked to the door. Lorente moved aside quickly to allow him to pass.

CHAPTER II

ERRAND OF MERCY



THE wounded headman was stretched out on the dirt floor of the hut with his face turned all. Marshall turned him over. The headman opened his eyes but did not flinch as Marshall probed his wound. The deltoid muscle had been cut clean across near the shoulder joint. The ends of the torn muscles had contracted, and if the little fellow was to have use of his arm again, the muscle must be pulled together. It was a job beyond Marshall's skill. He cleansed the wound and started to bandage it as best he could.

"*Bwana*," the headman muttered faintly in Swahili, "I am not a thief—I am not a thief? A Kosango plunders in war but he does not steal in trade. I am no dog. I am a chief!"

"I do not think you are a thief, warrior," said Marshall gently. "Your country is Kosanga?"

"Even so, *Bwana*. I am called Itoko."

As Marshall finished the bandaging he noticed that the crescent-shaped ornament was missing from the chief's neck. "You speak good Swahili, Itoko. You have done much trading?"

"Yes, *Bwana*. My people are great hunters."

"Have you traded with *Bwana* Lorente, he that gave you this wound, before?"

"No, *Bwana*. It is the first time that I have brought my ivory to Mluluka. It is a hard thing, an evil thing, to die among strangers—a thief!"

"You will not die, Itoko. I will send a boy to look after you. Later, I will take you downriver to the mission hospital. Rest now, warrior."

When Marshall came out of the hut he found the compound deserted. He glanced at his watch and was surprised to find that it was near noon. The post was dozing in the lethargic heat through the hours of siesta. The rain was late that year. The sky was cloudless, a shimmering, cobalt bowl pouring down the withering fire of the sun. Even the caravan, camped in the clearing, had withdrawn into the shade of the forest. The smoke of their fires rose in straight columns above the trees.

Marshall walked across the red glare of the compound and stopped before the tusk he had been weighing a few hours before. He probed the cavity with the metal rod. It was evidently plugged with a disc of soft wood. He wound his arms around the tusk, heaved it up and pounded the butt on the hard ground. Ball shot, such as they sold to the natives, poured out of it.

Marshall picked up a few and rolled them in the palm of his big hand, with a frown between his eyes. It was unlikely that a native would stuff a tusk with shot. The molded lead was worth as much to a hunter as the ivory. Was it possible that Lorente had loaded the tusk during the night? Check the lead in stock against the record, that might answer the question. But it would have to wait until he got back from the mission at Fort Luis Filippe. He gathered up the shot in his topee, crossed the compound hurriedly, entered the bungalow, and going to his room, dumped them into his chest.

Lorente was snoring on his bamboo cot when Marshall went into his room and shook him.

"What the devil!" Lorente sat up, blinking at him.

"That boy has a good chance if he gets proper care," said Marshall. "With your permission, I'll take him down river to Filippe, *senhor.*"

"Ha!" Lorente jumped to his feet. "To the Fort, eh? What did he tell you?"

Marshall dropped into a cane chair and, tilting it back, rolled a cigarette methodically. "He told me that he is a Kosanga," he answered with his eyes fixed on Lorente's face. "Perhaps he's one of the tribe that ambushed you and maybe you were paying off an old score. Or maybe he can tell me more, *senhor.*"

Ball shot, such as they sold to the natives, poured out of the tusk.

A gleam came into Lorente's eyes. "No, nothing more, *senhor.* Holy saints, you are not slow! No, you grasp things quickly and forget nothing. It is true, when I saw him I knew him for a Kosango. I thought of my dead friends, of my loss in money, and there was blood in my eye. It was wrong, yes! Take him to Filippe, my friend. Tell the good father that I will pay."

Marshall's slow smile quirked the corners of his mouth. He was about to ask concerning the tusk plugged with shot and Itoko's necklet, but he checked himself, thinking that it was best to wait until he go back from Filippe before he shook Lorente down for the truth.

"Well, that's generous," said Marshall. "I want to be on my way before sundown."

"That is wise," Lorente agreed. "With this cursed drouth, soon there will not be enough water in the river to float a canoe. You can take Senjili and the boys with you."

Marshall was not particularly happy in the choice of Senjili. Lorente's headman was a *civilisado* and his exaggerated idea of the privileges that Portuguese citizenship conferred on him, pushed him over the line into downright insolence at times. But Marshall was glad to get away without further trouble and he raised no objection.

At sunset Itoko was carried down to the float of cottonwood logs in a mat of woven grass and made comfortable under the rattan shelter in the big dug-out canoe. Lorente came down to see them off. Marshall grinned as he took his place in the canoe. Lorente wasn't packing a gun, at least not where it could be seen.

"You will make good time downstream," Lorente shouted as they swung out into the current. "But you may have to walk back!" He laughed and saluted. "*Adeus, senhor* cowboy! *Adeus,* till we meet again!"

AS LORENTE had predicted, they made good time downstream, arriving at Fort Luis Filippe a little before sundown, two days later. Filippe was a typical Portuguese frontier town—a cluster of flat-roofed, pink-and-whitewashed adobe houses, flanking a road that sloped up from the river. A stockaded fort with iron-

roofed barracks crowned the hill which commanded the town and the river. The mission of Camelite friars was a white-washed building with castellated walls and cool, arched corridors shaded by palms, very like the missions Marshall had seen in California and Mexico.

While Itoko was taken to the hospital, Marshall chatted with a white-robed, worldly-looking Brother.

"Christian charity is rare in these parts, my son," said the monk. "You have done an act of mercy for which God will reward you."

"There is nothing owing, Father," said Marshall, flushing in his embarrassment. "Do you know *Senhor* Lorente at Mluluka, Father?"

"Ha, yes! We have heard of him. A man of violence and estranged from the Church."

"Hmm!" Marshall mused, rubbing his chin. "Well, I must leave tonight, Father. It is my wish to pay for Itoko's care."

The monk chuckled. "Ah, you are a jewel! Nothing is asked, nothing is expected—but a gift is alway thrice blessed. God go with you, my son!"

The Lujenda was falling rapidly. Fifty miles above Filippe, Marshall and his boys were forced to abandon their canoe. They continued the trek on foot, through the scented cedar forest and across the burned grassy savannah. They crossed streams that had dried into ripples of mud and the stench of decaying fish was in the fitful wind. Herds of game thundered across the veldt with the scent of the river strong in their nostrils. The Chockuas, a clan of the proud, slave-dealing Yaos, were leaving their villages and, driving their cattle before them, were trekking for Filippe in anticipation of famine.

Short rations forced Marshall to shoot for the pot and the withering heat forced him to short night marches. A trek of no more than two marches under normal conditions dragged out into eight. He marched into Mluluka at dawn on the sixth day. The post was deserted. The compound empty.

After the first shock of it, Marshall soothed the fears of his jabbering boys. "There has been no fighting, Senjili," he said to the headman. "*Bwana* Lorente has marched downriver with the ivory."

"Oh, doubtless he has marched with the ivory!" The Yao spat. "But not down the river!" he added with a vehemence that caused Marshall to give him a sharp look.

"We will talk about this later, Senjili," said he, scowling upon the Yaos who were crowding around them with bulging eyes. "Come to the bungalow after chop."

"Oh, yes, *Bwana*!" said Senjili, visibly swelling with importance.

From the veranda of the bungalow Marshall looked around the silent, empty compound, his face awry with a grimace of self-depreciation, feeling the smart of defeat. Mendos had said that Mluluka might break him and, by thunder, it had! He'd been warned, sent to watch Lorente, but Lorente had walked out of Mluluka with thirteen thousand pounds' worth of ivory, from right under his nose! So much for the romantic dreams that had lured him to Africa! His career as a *Bwana* was blasted before it had fairly begun. He could hear the old-timers talking, laughing— "Did you hear that one about young Marshall up at Mluluka—" No, not that! Laughter could kill a man, slowly. Hatred of Lorente, so intense that it whitened his lips and made his hands shake, swept over Marshall. No, he'd get the ivory! He'd get Lorente if he had to turn the continent upside down and shake him out!

He went into the bungalow to take stock. Papers littered the floor of the main room and the storeroom had been rifled. Lorente must have moved out with the caravan; he'd taken all he could carry plus the ivory. But there were several cases of canned food left. Also a dozen muskets stood in the rack and there was powder and shot. Vaguely he wondered why Lorente hadn't set fire to the post. Possibly because he'd wanted to get away quietly without arousing the neighboring villages. He found his Mannlicher .450 and ammunition in his room and he had his Winchester with him. Marshall took the rifles out into the main room and stood them against the wall as one of the Yaos came into serve his chop.

When Senjili came to stand in the doorway, Marshall called him in and gave him a brimmer of gin.

"You are right, Senjili," he said, as the Yao licked his thick lips. "*Bwana* Lorente has stolen the ivory. Now, where would he take it?"

"Into the Kosango country, *Bwana,*" was the prompt reply.

"How do you know that?" demanded Marshall.

Senjili's eyes became fixed on the square-faced bottle. Marshall poured him another brimmer which was swallowed in a gulp.

"*Bwana,*" Senjili began, "before you came, I counted the teeth. Sometimes the number that came in and the number we sent downriver was not the same. When I told *Bwana* Lorente about this, he cursed me and said that I could not count. Once he flogged me so I spoke of it no more. But I am not stupid and I have eyes."

"Well, Senjili?"

"The number of teeth sent to the coast was wrong only when the caravan came from Kosango, *Bwana.*"

"Ah! Some of the ivory that came with the caravan went back with it, then?"

"Even so, *Bwana.*"

"Where did the ivory go?"

Senjili shifted uneasily, his face became wooden. "It went to Kosango country. That is all I know, *Bwana.*"

"Perhaps it is all you choose to tell, Senjili. But no matter. I must catch this thief. Can you follow his spoor?"

The Yao rolled his eyes and looked around the room. "Perhaps I could, *Bwana.* But with ten men—it is a thing unheard of! These Kosangos are not children, *Bwana.*"

Marshall smiled, picked up the Mannlicher and handed it to the Yao. "Is this a good gun, Senjili?"

"Oh, yes!" said Senjili, handling it lovingly.

"It is yours, Senjili. Also a musket and powder and shot for each of your men. Will they go?"

"Oh, they will march!" said Senjili grimly.

"At sundown then, Senjili."

"At sundown, *Bwana!*"

CHAPTER III

TWELVE GUNS

TEN days later Marshall and his little band, following the dry bed of the Luangwa, toiled upward onto the parkland of the Kosango plateau. It was undulating country with wild and fantastically broken scenery, deep kloofs and granite kopjies alternating with wooded hills, some very densely covered with mimosa brush. That night Marshall's tent was pitched on a hill in a small clearing overlooking the valley of the Luchlingo; but the river itself was baked, cracked clay with a miserable thread of water meandering through the cracks.

When his Yaos' fires were flaring orange against the black velvet of the night, and when the cicadas drummed in their tiny burrows, Senjili came to squat by Marshall's fire. Marshall watched him fill his wide nostrils with snuff with a speculative look in his gray eyes. He would have liked to know more about Senjili, but he had come to realize that the Yao would talk when the spirit moved him and not before. It seemed to him that the headman's answers came too pat. It was more likely that they sprang from actual knowledge than from deductive reasoning as Senjili evidently wanted him to believe. The likely thing was that Senjili was implicated in Lorente's very lucrative enterprise, buying ivory with the *Companhia do Nyassa's* trade goods and running it across the border into German East Africa. Yes, Lorente had had a nice set-up, according to Senjili, before headquarters had become suspicious. No wonder his arrival at Mluluka had roused a devil in Estevao Lorente. And it looked very much as if Lorente had roused another devil when he had marched out of Mluluka, overlooking Senjili's claim to a share in the booty.

"Mwembe, a big Yao kraal is a day's march from here, *Bwana,*" Senjili announced suddenly. "The Chief is a half Arab called Bushir bin Habib."

The name rang like a bell in Marshall's memory, but he showed no surprise. "*Bwana* Lorente spoke of him," he answered indifferently. "But he said that the Kosangos had killed Habib."

Senjili chuckled. "It is a good thing for Bushir bin Habib that men believe him dead! Oh, yes, Habib has grown fat on death. Long ago, *Bwana,* Habib and the *Bwana* Lorente borrowed money, much money, from the merchants at Zanzibar. They came into this country with a big caravan. They traded for much ivory and stole more. They were rich, but they

were not happy because half of what they had gained belonged to the merchants. So Bushir bin Habib was killed in a fight and *Bwana* Lorente went to Zanzibar to tell the merchants that all was lost. But Bushir bin Habib was not dead. No, he kept his people with him. He drove the Kosangos out of this country, killed many and made others his slaves. Then he built Mwembe, a strong kraal, and made himself chief of this country. He has many men and many guns. I tell you this, *Bwana*, because now that we are here, I wonder what you can do against him with twelve guns!"

Marshall jumped to his feet. "Why was I not told this before?" he demanded angrily.

Senjili rose and faced him, his hard-featured face immobile. *"Sayama poli-poli!"* he said. "Softly, softly!"

Marshall gritted his teeth and cursed himself inwardly for a fool. He saw only too clearly that Senjili had withheld what he knew until they were well clear of Fort Luis Filippe and a possible appeal for men and guns. Right now he was just one fool of a white man among eleven Yaos that he had armed himself! The Yaos would obey their headman, not him.

Calmness came with the realization that Senjili was working towards some dark end. He tried a shot in the dark. "You are the man that went to Zanzibar with *Bwana* Lorente," said he coolly. "How much were you promised to keep his secret?"

"This is not good talk!" The Yao scowled.

"It is in my mind that the Company will pay you much if we catch these thieves, Senjili."

The Yao spat and laughed. "The Company would pat my shoulder and say, 'Good boy—good boy!' And they will not pay *you* as much as the Germans will pay for half the ivory if *we* sold it at Mabampo."

MARSHALL smiled. So, that was it! Lorente had an apt pupil in Senjili. And Senjili needed him for something or he wouldn't have so generously offered him half of the Company's ivory.

He gave the Yao a sharp look. "How will we get the ivory?"

"For half of it, I will tell you that!" Senjili grinned insolently.

"For half of it, then," Marshall agreed with a wry smile.

"When the rain comes and *Bwana* Lorente can get porters, he will make a caravan and march to Mabampo, which is in the German country, five marches from Mwembe, Bushir bin Habib's kraal—"

"We cannot ambush a caravan with twelve men, Senjili," Marshall interposed with quick comprehension.

"No, no, *Bwana!* But there is a Kosangos village nearby. The Kosangos hate the Yaos because we make them work for us. They will make a trap for the caravan if a white *bwana* tells them to do so. Ho, when I was with *Bwana* Lorente, I learned how to make traps! If you will come, I will show—" He broke off suddenly and slowly straightened up, looking from right to left.

"What is it?" asked Marshall.

Senjili motioned him to silence. Then a spurt of flame flared in the blackness. Senjili pitched forward across the fire. Marshall's Colt roared a split second after the report of the musket. There was a yelp and the crash of a body falling in the bush. Marshall flung himself on the ground and rolled out of the firelight. He could see nothing, but there was the rustle of movement in the bush all around him. Senjili's men stood bathed in firelight, motionless, fearing to move lest a volley be poured into them by the unseen foe.

"You are surrounded! Throw down your gun, *senhor!*" Estevao Lorente's hoarse voice yelled out of the blackness.

With an oath, Marshall rose and flung his gun into the circle of firelight. Black, amorphous shapes emerged from the surrounding bush and crept toward him. Soon he stood in a pool of firelight, surrounded by Yaos, and looking into the gaping muzzles of their muskets. Lorente pushed through them into the firelight. He turned Senjili's body over with his foot and grunted.

"So the fool followed me!" he said with a short laugh. "Ah, but I knew he would, as surely as I knew that you would come with him alone!" He looked into Marshall's face and shook his vulture's head. "It is a pity about you, *senhor!* Holy

saints, what a man you would be if you were as quick with your brain as you are with your gun!"

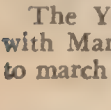
"If you've got another killing on your mind, get on with it!" said Marshall, vaguely wondering if it would be possible to hit Lorente twice, before the Yaos' muskets blasted him.

"Kill you!" Lorente spread his hands and shrugged. "The devil! Why should I do that? I have worked for ten years to make a fortune. I mean to live to enjoy it, not to be hounded for the shooting of a white man. Am I as big a fool as you? No, not Estevao Lorente! I will take you to Mwembe. My good friend, Bushir bin Habib will keep you there until I am clear of this cursed country. Then he will let you go, perhaps. And you will go to the coast and tell that fat swine, Mendos, what became of his ivory and much more that he paid for, but will never see. I make a good joke for everyone, eh, *senhor?* But Mendos, he will not laugh, eh?"

Marshall bit his lips, while the Portuguese laughed.

"They send you—a boy!" Lorente wiped tears from his eyes. "To watch me, who knows Africa as I do the palm of my hand! How do such people get rich? Ah, but you do not laugh—the joke is on you, too, eh? A thousand pardons, *senhor!*" He turned and gave a sharp command.

The Yaos formed into a double line with Marshall between them. The order to march was given.



MWEMBE was an oasis in the desert of famine and disease. The rinderpest had come with the prolonged drouth. The cattle died and their carcasses on the plain stank in the sun. But within the mud-walled town itself, there was plenty. Its stilted, grass silos were full of grain and a cold, subterranean stream bubbled into its wells and filled them to overflowing.

Marshall was allowed the freedom of the town, famine was his jailer. He had been given a room in Bushir bin Habib's own house. Sometimes he took his meals with Lorente and the venerable half-Arab who looked more like a saint than the shrewd, old rogue he was. But when they met, Lorente never missed an opportunity to jibe at Marshall and more often he ate alone, or wandered aimlessly among the daub and wattle huts of the town.

As the days wore on and there was still no rain, Lorente fumed and cursed the drouth. To act as porters was beneath the dignity of Habib's Yaos who lived like feudal aristocrats in their stronghold. Lorente could get no bearers to move his ivory.

The whereabouts of the ivory had puzzled Marshall at first. There was no building in the town large enough to hold it. Then it occurred to him it might be cached somewhere out in the wooded hills that overlooked the plain and town—for he knew that it was the custom of native chiefs to bury their hoards in scattered caches to protect them from the rapacity of the well-armed filibuster.

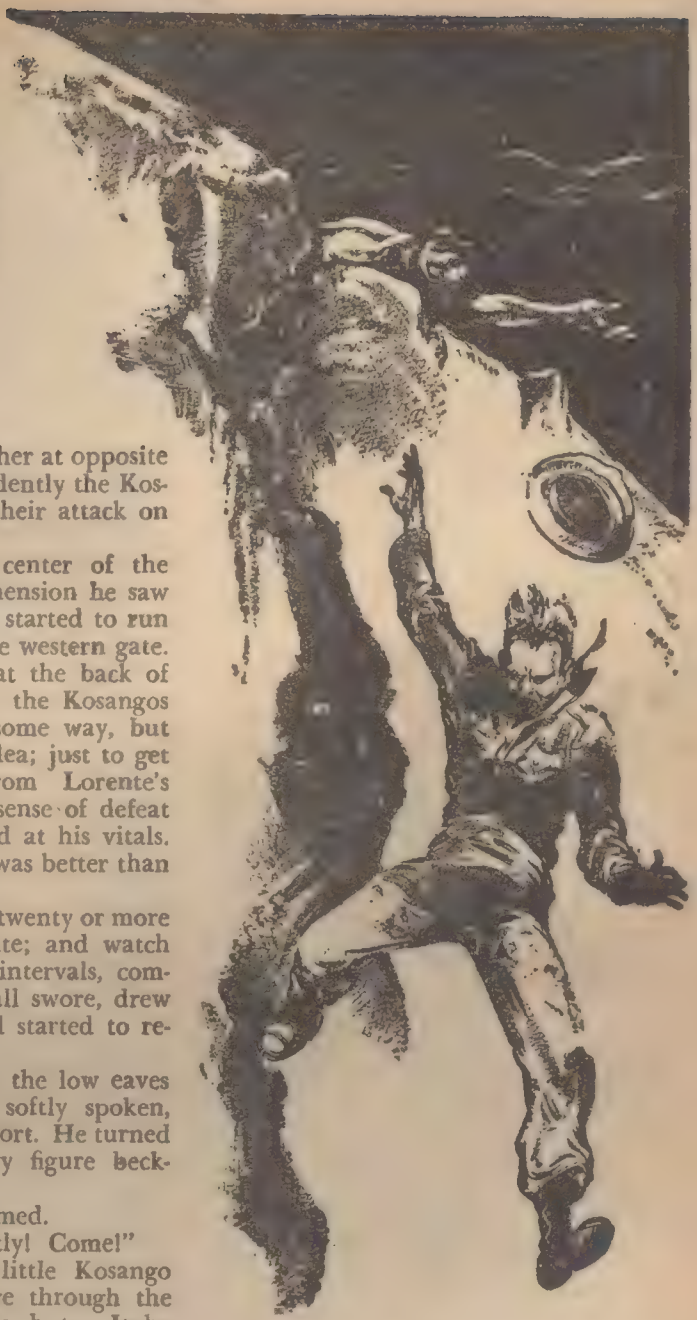
Towards sundown, on the day that ended Marshall's third week at Mwembe, a tribe of natives swarmed down from the hills. Marshall watched them from the flat roof of Bushir bin Habib's house through an old ship's telescope. As they debouched onto the plain, with the white dust rising under their feet and caking on their sweating bodies, so that they looked like the gray ghosts of men, he saw hunger in the lean bodies of the warriors, despair in the sullen faces of the women. And there was anger, too. Spears were shaken and the shrill curses of the women reached his ears.

"They are Kosangos," observed Bushir bin Habib, who stood beside Lorente, pulling his long beard. "Accursed sons of Shaitan! They will want food. See, they make camp!"

"They have no guns," said Lorente. "A volley will drive them off."

Habib shook his head. "If they do not attack, we will not shoot. *Wallai,* I have seen these Kosangos charge! With hunger gnawing in their bellies, they will be like devils out of hell. We will give them some food and—Allah, willing it—they will be gone in the morning."

But that night Marshall awoke with the report of a musket echoing in his ears. By the time he had dressed and made his way out, pandemonium was loose in Mwembe. Naked Yaos were pouring out of the huts and yelling like fiends. Ragged volleys of musketry filled the night with the heady fumes of burning powder. Like most large native towns, Mwembe had



Marshall tossed the dead Yao's musket down to Itoko. Then he let himself down over the wall and, stretching out to arm's length, dropped.

two gates, one facing the other at opposite ends of a central road. Evidently the Kosangos were concentrating their attack on the eastern gate.

Marshall stood in the center of the road. With quick comprehension he saw his chance, grasped it, and started to run through the shadows for the western gate. There was a dim notion at the back of his mind that if he got to the Kosangos they might help him in some way, but escape was his dominant idea; just to get away from Mwembe, from Lorente's mockery and the nagging sense of defeat and impotence that chewed at his vitals. Anything—even starvation was better than that.

But there was a guard of twenty or more Yaos posted before the gate; and watch towers, spaced at regular intervals, commanded the walls. Marshall swore, drew back into the shadows and started to retrace his steps.

As he was passing under the low eaves of a hut, a hiss and a softly spoken, *"Bwana!"* pulled him up short. He turned quickly. A short, shadowy figure beckoned.

"Itoko!" Marshall exclaimed.

"Yes, *Bwana.* Softly, softly! Come!"

Marshall followed the little Kosango headman's crouching figure through the narrow lanes between the huts. Itoko headed straight for one of the watch towers.

"The guard, Itoko!" Marshall warned in a whisper.

"He's dead, *Bwana!* I made a hole under the wall here long ago, but you are too big for it. You must climb the ladder and drop from the wall. Quickly, before these Yao dogs see that this attack is a trick!"

Marshall ran for the ladder. It was the trunk of a tree with slats nailed across it. He went up like a monkey. The Yao sentry was slumped in a corner with his throat so thoroughly cut that his head lolled to one side horribly. The firing had

stopped. The Yaos were shouting in triumph and screaming taunts at the repulsed foe. Out on the plain the Kosangos' fires glowed in the distance like the yellow eyes of beasts. The moon was new, its crescent paled to silver by the brilliance of the stars.

Marshall picked up the dead Yao's musket and tossed it down to Itoko. Then he let himself down over the wall and, stretching out to arm's length, dropped. The fall knocked the wind out of him and jarred every bone in his body. Itoko helped him to his feet. As soon as he had recovered, they started to crawl across the star-lit plain. There was a shot, and a bullet plucked the dirt close to Marshall's ear. With a thrill of fear Marshall realized that his white shirt and topee would show like a flare against the black of the plain. He sprang to his feet and raced for the fires with hot lead singing in his ears.

ITOKO led him to a fire that burned in the center of the Kosango encampment. There were several women grouped around the fire, naked, but for a tuft of grass before and behind. They rose as the two men approached and discreetly effaced themselves in the surrounding gloom. Marshall sat down before the fire. Itoko picked up a buffalo horn and blew an ear-piercing blast upon it.

Soon the Kosangos came streaming back from their sham attack, laughing and boasting and evidently very well pleased with themselves and the success of their chief's strategy. Some, who had probably never seen a white man before, came to stare and point at Marshall. Lean, hungry-looking warriors they were, armed with slender-bladed hunting spears and painted shields. Then a drum began to throb and the curious by-standers were drawn away to join in the dancing.

"These are my people, *Bwana,*" said Itoko proudly. "We are great hunters."

Marshall looked at Itoko thoughtfully. "How did you know I was in Mwembe?"

Itoko grinned, showing his strong, white teeth. "I am chief of my people because I am the best hunter among them, *Bwana.* When my arm was well, I wanted to talk with you before I returned to my kraal. So I came to Mluluka and saw that evil had been done there. Your spoor was not hard to follow. I followed it and, lo, I found the bones of a man where you had made your fire. Then I found the spoor of many men and followed it here. Then I went for my people.

"Oh, evil men live here, *Bwana!* Once they caught *me* and made me a slave. But one day their chief lost the fetish he was wont to wear around his neck. I found it. It was a powerful fetish, with magic signs on it that spoke. It made the Yaos blind, for one night I made a hole in their wall and stole out of their kraal and no man saw me!"

"Was the fetish shaped like the moon when it is new, Itoko?"

"Even so. It was a pretty thing and I am sorry that I lost it."

"You did not lose it, Itoko. The white *Bwana* took it from you and he tried to kill you because white men believe that Bushir bin Habib is dead. He feared that some white man might see the fetish and question you about it."

"Oh, there would have been no need for him to ask me, *Bwana.* It could speak for itself!" said Itoko gravely.

"Maybe you're not far wrong at that, Itoko!"

For a long time Marshall sat before the fire lost in thought. The stars were pale before he stretched out on the ground and slept until the chatter of the women about their cooking fires awoke him. Itoko brought him *banganju,* a mess of native greens and oil. He accepted it gratefully and invited the chief to sit beside him.

"Your cooking pots are not full, Itoko," observed Marshall.

"Soon they will be. We followed the game to the lake, *Bwana.*"

"There is much food in Mwembe, Itoko. Enough to feed your people for many days."

"It is so?" Itoko looked across the plain to the walled town and shook his head. "It is a strong place and they have many guns. We could not get into it, *Bwana.*"

"I have thought of a way, Itoko." Marshall swept his hands towards the hills. "The white *bwana* has hidden my ivory in the hills. You have many people. Surely great hunters such as the Kosangos could find a way to track down some of this ivory."

"Oh, doubtless!" affirmed Itoko confidently.

"Then let it be done, Itoko," Marshall urged.

The chief scowled. "I would take your ivory to Mluluka, *Bwana,* because there is a bond between us. But, my people will not do it until they have filled their bellies."

"I have not asked you to take my ivory to Mluluka yet, Itoko. To find some of it is all I ask. Will you do this thing for me?"

Itoko rose with a comic look of bewilderment on his face. Truly, the ways of white men were beyond all hope of understanding.

"Yes, *Bwana,*" said he, and taking up his horn, called his warriors to palaver.

Within an hour the Kosangos were leaving the camp in groups, to scour the hills. Marshall remained behind, watching the flat roof of Bushir bin Habib's house. Presently two figures came to stand on the roof. Marshall watched them anxiously. Bushir bin Habib and Lorente would guess what the Kosangos were after. Lorente would fume and sweat. He'd want to risk an attack on the Kosangos, but cautious old Habib would wait until he knew the result of the search. Everything depended on Bushir bin Habib's caution.

As the sun inclined from its meridian and the Yaos were quiet behind their walls, Marshall began to pace up and down restlessly, waiting for Itoko and his men.

The two figures had returned to the roof; they, too, were watching for the return of the Kosangos' searching parties.

It was near sundown before the Kosangos came into camp. Itoko looked sour when he came to report.

"We have found some of the ivory, *Bwana.* We left it where we found it, as you told us to do."

"How much, Itoko?"

"Only forty tusks, *Bwana,* but they are big teeth," he added defensively.

A gleam came into Marshall's eyes. He as good as had one foot inside Mwembe.

"It is enough! You have done well! Now, come with me, Itoko."

They left the camp, crossed the plain and climbed the wooded hill that overlooked the west gate of the town.

CHAPTER IV

PEACE FOR THE DEAD

MWEMBE was like an island floating in the shimmering heat waves, beating up from the plain. They stood upon a trail that led down to the gate. Marshall's eyes followed the path through the town and across the veldt to where it entered a gap in the hills on the opposite side of the plain. There it joined the old caravan road to Mluluka and appeared again like a red welt on the shoulder of a low, sloping hill to the northeast side of the town; then it dropped out of sight into a densely-wooded kloof.

Marshall studied the landscape carefully, checking its features against his memory of the scene as he had seen it through the telescope from the roof of Habib's house. His level was above that of the house, yet he could see only that small section of the road where it arched over the low hill. From the roof of Habib's house even less of it could be seen. It was a perfect set-up. His problem was to get the idea across to Itoko.

It took a long time, but Marshall went over it again and again with inexhaustible patience. At last understanding dawned in Itoko's bright eyes. He jumped to his feet with a shout and shook his spear at the town. Then he executed a comical little dance of exultation.

"Remember," Marshall reiterated, "Bushir bin Habib must be made to think that we have found all the ivory and are on the march to Mluluka. The porters must march slowly—slowly, slowly, Itoko, so that the first men have time to run back through the forest and come out onto the road again before the last men are out of sight."

"Oh, yes, *Bwana!*"

"And when you have carried the same ivory across the hill five times, what will you do?"

"We will throw the teeth down and run into the bush, *Bwana,* then I will lead my men back to this same place where we now stand."

"You've got it!" exclaimed Marshall, wiping the sweat from his neck and face.

Marshall watched the dawn break over the eastern hills and with it came the first

sign of rain. Vast banks of clouds, red with the first rays of the sun, hid the distant peaks of the Msenga range and rolled southward on the wings of a freshening wind.

The Kosangos had broken their camp and, under cover of the night, had concealed their women and children in a wooded valley. Marshall had taken a position on the hill overlooking the western gate of the town. Behind him, crouched in the bush, a hundred Kosangos looked down upon the sleeping town with hollow, hungry eyes.

As the sun climbed, Marshall's attention became fixed on the strip of road across the plain. Suddenly the sun's rays flashed on metal. Black figures appeared on the road like linked dots. Itoko was leading his men with the ivory over the arch of the road. Each tusk, he knew, was lashed to a stout bamboo pole and carried on the shoulders of two men. A gap appared in the slowly-moving line of paired dots, and Marshall's pulse quickened with alarm.

But soon other dots appeared behind them. It looked as if an endless line of porters was crossing the hill. The Kosangos behind him pointed and uttered exclamations of wonderment. They knew that their chief had not taken so many men.

A happy smile appeared on Marshall's face—the bait was being dragged under Lorente's nose; soon he must get wind of it.

Suddenly the report of a musket shattered the crystal silence of the morning. Then a drum began to throb an alarm, its urgent, incessant clamor re-echoing among the hills. Presently two figures came to stand on the roof of Habib's house. The white of the Arab's robe and Lorente's topee showed against the burned background of the hill. Their movements were quick, agitated, and the smile on Marshall's face broadened into a grin. In a moment they were gone.

Now black figures were running out of the huts and massing on the central road. Then the swarm burst out of the eastern gate and streaked across the veldt toward the Mluluka road, with Bushir bin Habib and Lorente at its head.

Marshall waited tensely until he judged the Yaos had covered half the distance. Then he jumped to his feet, and yelling at his Kosangos, led them down the hill. Like a black wave, they swept across the plain at his heels. A volley of musketry dropped a few of them as they neared the western gate of the town. But the savory smell of Mwembe's fleshpots was in the nostrils of the hungry Kosangos. Nothing could stop them. The gate burst open as they hurled

Nothing could stop the hungry Kosangos. The gate burst open as they hurled the sheer weight of their numbers against it.

the sheer weight of their numbers against it. The few Yaos that had been left behind made a stand in the middle of the road and another volley was poured into them as they rushed into the town. The Kosangos wavered. Yelling like a fiend, Marshall rallied them and furiously led the charge.

After a few minutes of sharp, hand-to-hand fighting, those of the Yaos who had not been speared, threw down their arms —and Marshall was undisputed master of Mwembe.

Itoko had circled through the bush and his men, with the Kosangos' women and children, were pouring in through the western gate before Bushir bin Habib and Lorente had grasped what had happened; or, if they had, their men were scattered among the hills beyond quick recall, still searching for the illusive caravan that had vanished before their eyes.

IT WAS noon before the last of the Arab's Yaos straggled wearily down from the hills. Bushir bin Habib encamped on the plain out of range of musket shot, before the walls of his town. Backed up by Itoko's authority and the prestige that came with success, Marshall was able to restrain the Kosangos who otherwise would have speared every hated Yao left within the walls.

Then began a siege which was a rare, if not a unique inversion of its classical counterpart; for while the besieged lived in plenty, the besiegers starved on the veldt. Bushir bin Habib had too little ammunition to risk wasting it in an unsuccessful assault on his town. Marshall had too few guns to risk a pitched battle on the plain. Moreover, as Marshall saw it, there had been bloodshed enough. Hunger would force Lorente and Habib to surrender their guns and the ivory in the long run. It was just a matter of time, and not a long time at that.

That night the Kosangos gorged themselves. The night was filled with the rumble of their drums and their chant of victory. Marshall left orders with Itoko to keep a strict watch, then went to Habib's house. He found his Colt and gun-belt in Lorente's room. Fully dressed, he flung himself on the bamboo cot and was soon asleep.

Itoko shook him awake shortly after sun-up. "The Bearded One and the white man come, *Bwana,*" said he as Marshall sat up.

"Alone?"

"Yes, *Bwana.*"

Marshall went up to the roof, Itoko following him. Lorente and Bushir bin Habib were advancing slowly toward the wall. Lorente carried a pole from which a white rag fluttered.

Marshall grinned at Itoko. "We rooted them out before chop yesterday," said he. "They are hungry already and want to palaver."

Marshall led the way down, buckled on his gun-belt, and leaving Itoko and half a dozen Kosangos to cover him from the walls, went out by the eastern gate. About fifty yards from it he stopped and waited for the Arab and Lorente to come up to him.

Lorente was the first one to speak. He smiled but suppressed anger burned behind his eyes.

"It is a clever trick you play, *senhor,*" he admitted. "If I made jokes of your wits, I have come to regret that."

"That's not what you've come to tell me, Lorente," said Marshall coldly.

Bushir bin Habib did not speak, but he pulled at his beard while his black, intelligent eyes darted from the face of one to the other, as each spoke.

"We are reasonable men, my friend Bushir and I. We will give you the nineteen hundred fraslas of ivory and allow you to depart in peace."

A cold glint came into Marshall's eyes as he said, "The ivory is the property of the *Companhia do Nyassa.* You cannot give it to me, *senhor.* But you will surrender it and yourself with it. I will leave Mwembe when I please, and take you to Fort Luis Filippe with me."

"Holy Saints!" Lorente laughed. "How the young cockerel crows! *Senhor,* the ivory you found is not mine. It is Bushir bin Habib's. You will never find *my* ivory, unless I show you where it is."

"Then go where it is and eat it, *senhor!*" said Marshall. He turned to leave them; but out of the tail of his eye, he saw Lorente dodge behind Bushir bin Habib. In a flash he turned again. The roar of his Colt blended with the report of Lorente's gun. The Portuguese sank to the ground, clutching at Bushir bin Habib's robe, almost dragging the Arab down with him.

"Merciful Allah!" Habib freed himself from Lorente's death grin, then he kicked at the prone body. "Dog of a Nazarani—fool! His bullet might have killed me!"

"What I hold in my hand is the father of six, Habib," Marshall warned. "The man is dead; leave him in peace."

"And let there be peace between us, Sidi!" returned the Arab hastily, with his eyes fixed on the flashing metal of the Colt. "You speak well and shoot straighter, praise be to Allah! I know when I am beaten, but this fool did not! I will bring the ivory he stole, Sidi."

"And all that you helped him to steal before I came to Mluluka, Buishir bin Habib."

"Merciful Allah!" Habib gasped. He looked into Marshall's face and, evidently satisfied with what he saw there, he spread

his hands and said, in resignation, "All of it, then, Sidi."

"And you will surrender your guns, Habib."

"Surrender my guns! Leave my people unarmed at the mercy of the Shensis?" Habib shook his head firmly. "No, I will not do that, Sidi. I am their chief."

Marshall smiled. Bushir bin Habib was a rogue but not one without conscience and dignity. A better man than Lorente; better perhaps, than many whites who came to Africa to make a fortune.

"Very well," Marshall agreed. "The Kosangos will be my porters. You need not fear them. When I leave Mwembe, half of your men will march with me. They will carry their guns but no powder and shot. When we reach Mluluka, I will pay them in powder and shot and I will send them back to you. I have spoken!"

Habib stroked his beard and sighed. "You have much wisdom for one so young. Allah smiles upon you—lo, His ways are wonderful! It is agreed. Go when you will. Leave us our women and children and food enough to feed them. May the peace of Allah go with thee!"

"And with you, Bushir bin Habib. And may the follies of thy youth pass thy doorstep, their footsteps never faltering!"

"Allah grant it!" intoned Habib fervently . . .

Marshall was ready to march two days later. He was anxious to get to Mluluka before the heavens, overcast with black rain clouds, opened and flooded the road. A long line of porters stretched out over the veldt before Mwembe, each pair squatted beside their load, a prime tusk. Marshall surveyed the lot, about three thousand fraslas in all. It wasn't bad, not bad at all for a "first-timer!" There would be some talk of it in Mozambique for a while.

He raised his hand. Itoko ran down the line of porters, shouting. The loads were lifted. A drum began to throb.

With his rifle nestled in the crook of his arm, his battered topee set at a rakish angle, and with the suggestion of a swagger in his walk, Marshall led them onto the Mluluka road.

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THE HEAD OF THE BEARDED ONE

ILLUSTRATED BY JOSEPH A. FARREN

IT ISN'T easy to tell you this story the way Derwent—J. Livingstone Derwent, III, that is—told it. But Derwent isn't around these parts any more; he high-tailed it back to the States as soon as he could finagle a bucket-seat, and left the rest of us guys sitting on our *derrières* up here at Barrow after pledging us to secrecy. Because if Mary Marshall, his fiancée, ever found out about Kuparuk Memoranna Steve Illavarnik Olitok Joe Noashak Pammigbluk Nellie Seattle Jim Palaiyak, the belle of Coronation Gulf, she might not understand. In fact, there were a lot of things that J. Livingstone

Above the roar and clash of ice, the lonely howls of the Eskimo girl's dogs sounded.

Derwent, III, himself—and you can see that he was the kind of a guy who took names seriously—didn't understand about Kuparuk Memoranna Steve Illavarnik Olitok *ad infinitum*.

You see, Derwent was the proud descendant of one of America's oldest and most cultured families. All you had to do was look at him—his almost cherubic countenance with its long-lashed eyes and delicately-tinted skin, his slim, tapering musician-poet's fingers and altogether noble six-feet-two of pink flesh and blue blood—to know that he had been born with a sterilized silver spoon in his mouth. You'd know it, too, when you heard him talk, for his words came out round and deliberate, with just enough of that patrician accent so that you could picture those vowels being broadened as they curved around that silver spoon.

He was the youngest American meteorologist north of the Arctic Circle and considered himself, for a while, at least, quite an authority on the *mores* and manners of Eskimos. He'd read up on them while lolling on the beach at Montecito and had even gone to the trouble of inventing his own short-cut to the primitive mind: the famous Derwentian Elementary Yipyap and Sign Language. And it's no lie that he was so much in love with this Santa Barbara girl, Mary Marshall, that he actually had promised to bring home the skin of a great big woolly polar bear to keep her tootsies warm when she stepped out of bed.

IT WAS to keep this promise that Derwent persuaded Major Tex Bennett and Captain Ray Long, the undersigned, to fly him in to Herschel Isand where he caught Cap Ivorsen's little schooner, the *Jennie Q.*, shoving off for one last trip to Cape Kellett before the ice closed in. Learning that the skipper had a locker well-stocked with Scotch, Tex and I went along just for the ride. It was quite a ride.

Cape Kellett is one of those dreary, God-forsaken gravel heaps poking its nose out into the Arctic Ocean from Banks Island in latitude 72 degrees north. Wizened, tough old Cap Ivorsen had been trading with the Copper Eskimos—Stefansson's "blond Eskimos"—in this Coronation Gulf country for years and he was pretty touchy about permitting any fraternization with his customers. But he did let Derwent go into the village to buy the reeking head of a bearded seal for bear bait and to lend-lease a dogteam and sledge for an overnight trek out on the sea ice. The polar bears like to hang around open leads watching for seals, and Derwent, who knew how to handle a dogteam, spent all morning loading his fancy-pantsy gear and by early afternoon was a mere bobbing speck as viewed from the porthole of the *Jennie Q.'s* cabin.

Tex and I went on playing gin rummy until about an hour later when, in a bad state of parch, we sought out the skipper and received the discouraging news that the inventor and sole owner of the famous Derwentian Elementary Yipyap and Sign Language had been so wrapped up in his preparations for providing for Mary Marshall's tootsies that he'd gone off and left us holding the bag. Faced as we were with the awful propect of having to remain practically in a state of cottonmouth throughout a long arctic night, we naturally availed ourselves of the first opportunity to do something about it.

J. Livingstone Derwent, III, he told us afterward, had gone about six miles out on the sea ice before he discovered that he was being followed. A selfish fellow, quite unwilling to share his long anticipated adventure with another human soul, he at once took evasive action and along about sundown, by virtue of having just got across several open leads by the skin of his teeth, he encamped on a cozy spot where the wind, which had risen to 8 on the Beaufort Scale, was only 7 on the Beaufort Scale. He picketed and fed his dogs, pitched his Burberry, lugged in his de luxe sleeping bag, several caribou hides and the primus stove, staked the head of the bearded seal on the edge of the lead, then crawled into the tent.

"It was a perfect set-up," he said. "All I had to do was sit on my sleeping bag with my rifle across my knees. The head of the Bearded One was staked to windward of the dogs. A polar would smell it and come running; the dogs would smell the polar bear and bark; I'd dash out and shoot the bear. And then," he added simply, "Mary would have her bearskin."

And sure enough, after he'd been sitting there in the dark dreaming of Mary

Marshall and the Coral Casino for about half an hour, the dogs began to bark. He scrambled out, all goosey with excitement and prepared to blaze away at the bear. Only it wasn't a bear.

"Excited as I was," he said, "I still could not resist a momentary time-out to marvel at the scene. The wind was spilling off the North Pole and flooding down the icy wastes, singing in a shrill minor. Overhead, the stars were shining with the hard cold brilliance of cut-perfect jewels. Before me in the snow were the dark forms of the dogs tugging at their lines; beyond in the lead fantastic-shaped floes moved in solemn, unending procession. And then I saw the strange sledge and walking toward me and carrying what looked like a big black watermelon was this weird figure."

The watermelon turned out to be the heard of the bearded seal and the Eskimo was a girl and she was laughing with a great show of white teeth, very pleased about something and very triumphant.

"Keee!" she shouted in a high, boyish voice, coming straight at him until in the yellow glare of his flashlight he could see the tattoo marks on her face. "Keee!" And she held out her hand, palm upward, in an obvious gesture of friendship. He shifted his rifle and perfunctorily shook hands with her, recoiling slightly at the stench from the seal's head. "Eskimo village that way," he told her, waving toward Banks Island. "And put that bear bait back where you found it."

She laughed with joy and held out her hand again.

"Keee!"

"O.K., O.K.!" he growled, pumping her carbou mitten. "Now look: you savvy go-'long home-scram-vamoose-beat it and get to hell out of here!" That was harsh language for J. Livingstone Derwent, III. But he was very annoyed.

She nodded brightly, then pointed to the tent: "In?"

"Out! Definitely out! Go build an igloo somewhere else!"

But she had dropped to her knees and was crawling into the Burberry. He reached down and seized her boots; she kicked him off and in a moment the tent had swallowed her. Swearing beneath his breath, he led her team around behind the tent, fearing a dog-fight. He was now more than annoyed; he was very angry; he was so angry that he thought he might just stay out there, shoot the bear when it came, then harness up and return to the *Jennie Q.*, leaving her the Burberry and all the gear in it. But any wind spilling off the north pole at 7 on the Beaufort Scale isn't exactly what you'd call balmy and besides, he remembered that she'd taken the seal's head in with her. It was a case of freeze or asphyxiate. He decided he'd rather hold his nose than get it frostbitten.

HE COULD see only the blue flame of the primus stove when he got inside the tent, so he lit the storm lantern. The girl was squatting on his sleeping bag, watching him with shining eyes, the head of the Bearded One clutched lovingly to her stomach. He scowled at her, perplexed. Beneath the disfiguring tattoo marks, he had to admit she was rather pretty in a pie-faced sort of a way. Her nose was not as broad nor her face as moon-shaped as those of the Alaskan Eskimos; nor were the rest of her features particularly Mongoloid but rather they favored the Nordic race. Her large brown diluent eyes were anything but almondy and he recalled that Stefansson had written that these Coronation Gulf people were thought to have in their blood traces of the vanished colonists of Leif Ericsson. He had also written that these superstitious, childlike primitives were so low on the scale of human intelligence, at least when he discovered them, that they were unable to comprehend any number greater than six.

Now it had taken a global war to keep J. Livingstone Derwent, III, from graduating from M.I.T *cum lande* at the tender age of seventeen. And while his heart belonged to Mary, his head belonged to Science with a capital S. So you can't blame him for feeling suddenly that he had something here for which even the biggest anthropologists would have given their right arms: in short, an ideal guinea pig for putting to test the famous Derwentian Elementary Yipyap and Sign Language. His only regret was that there wasn't a microphone in the tent so that the whole world could listen in while he proved that the distance between the Atomic Age Man and a Stone Age Woman

is practically micrometric. This regret was short-lived.

Tapping his lips and shaking his head, he inquired, "No savee all-time my talkee?"

To his surprise, she gave him a look of mingled comprehension and commiseration; then with a cluck of dismay she carefully laid her precious burden on the pillow of his sleeping bag and scuttled out into the night. She was back in a moment, a dead and bloody fox in one hand, a bulging blubberbag in the other. With a glad cry she held the fox aloft, her face radiant with motherly triumph and fish oil. "Eeet!" she screamed, as the embittered young scientist conceded the loss of the first round by covering his eyes with his hands lest they tell his patrician stomach the gory details.

It's no great trick to make a blubberbag—if you're an Eskimo. You kill a young seal and skin it through the mouth, turning it inside out, then sew up the openings where the tail and flippers had been and tie a thong around its neck. By the time Derwent found courage to peek through his fingers this little Eskimo Miss Muffet was squatting on her tuffet, all comfy before the primus stove; she had untied the thong and was fishing down through the little seal's mouth, messing around with her bare hands in the oil and hunks of blubber. She finally located just the dandy piece she wanted, held it up for him to see and admire, then splashed it into the pot of melted snow and licked her fingers—um-m-m *good!*

It took her an hour to prepare the meal and if she felt hurt because he spurned her offerings, she assuaged her feelings by eating his share, too. In unutterable, stomach-writhing horror he had to sit there and try not to watch her wolfing those hunks of slimy, half-cooked blubber, washing down each slobbering mouthful with a hearty swig of scalding blood soup.

Yet disgusted though he was, he also felt pity. The sight of her revolting table manners was softened by the reflection that she probably never had seen a table. She had the manners of an animal because, poor thing, she had been reared under conditions so barren and primitive that only a few animals could exist in them. He really felt sorry for her; and feeling sorry, he soon began feeling philosophical.

So when his melancholy eyes fell on the head of the bearded seal exhaling its foul fumes on his custom-made sleeping-bag, he no longer was angry; instead, he felt like Hamlet gazing at the skull of poor Yorick. Not many days—or, on second thought, weeks—ago, the Bearded One had been experiencing the joys and comforts of his own kingdom on this earth. For him: the swinging tide, the succulent flounder, the lazy basking in the noonday sun. For her: the Arctic snows, the bulging blubberbag, the long winter nights in an igloo. But as for J. Livingstone Derwent, III: he'd still, he decided, take Abercombie and Fitch.

THE girl suddenly brought him down to earth. She had topped off her meal with a straight shot of oil, good-naturedly given vent to a thunderous burp that shook her to the toes of her sealskin boots, and now her mirthful eyes took on an eerie, blubber-happy look. With manifest uneasiness, he sensed that she wanted to play a while before going to bed.

"Keee!" she whooped suddenly, coming after him on her hands and knees. "Keee!"

"Back!" he shouted in alarm. "Get back on your own side!" He felt like an animal trainer in the lion's cage and he wished he'd brought along a chair from the *Jennie Q.*

"Keee! Keee! Keee!" she insisted, grabbing for him.

He tried to fend her off without actually hurting her. "Get away, I tell you! Hands off! I'm practically a married man!"

She laughed deliriously. "Man! Man! Keee".

He caught her by the wrists and held her from him. "I don't get this 'keee' business. What you must mean is 'whee' or 'whoopee.' But let me tell you something," he went on desperately, "you've picked the wrong person to make whoopee with. I'm a respectable man—"

Abruptly her face turned grim, almost ferocious; her brown eyes smoldered and her nostrils began to twitch.

"Gimme!" she demanded. "Gimme! Man!" She squirmed from his grasp and plunged at him and for a moment they were locked together. He could feel her hand pawing around his pockets and a

great wave of indignation came over him and he pushed her off and retreated across the tent, his arteries scorching with the hot hormones of self-preservation.

"Now let's not get physical," he panted. "Just take it easy."

She lay curled on the floor, looking up at him and there was a sort of hurt wonderment in her eyes. And once again J. Livingstone Derwent, III, began to feel ashamed of himself. After all, she was just a kid, and a primitive, at that; and here he was a grown-up man of 21, a gentleman of the Atomic Age. *Come, come, Derwent; noblesse oblige, old fellow!* He'd flatter her, make up—for Cap Ivorsen had warned him to keep on friendly terms with the natives—then gently but firmly send her on her way.

Kneeling before her in an elaborately kindly fashion, he reached out one finger and playfully traced the tattoo marks on her cheeks. "Pretty," he cooed admiringly. "Make young Eskimo girl heap beautiful."

She sat up slowly, like a hypnotized child, and grinned. Then she suddenly remembered something and gleefully hoisting her caribou shirt, she proudly displayed the reasonable facsimile of a musk-ox rampant on her stomach. J. Livingstone Derwent, III, took one shocked look, turned his head away and gestured with both hands to pull the curtain.

There seemed to be only one thing left to do. He would appeal to her womanhood. These Eskimos, if not exactly monogamous, at least were supposed to have a certain sense of proprietorship as between man and woman even if it was somewhat seasonal.

"Look here," he said. "I want to show you something." And he took from his wallet the snapshot of Mary Marshall sitting behind the wheel of her convertible, with the breeze off the channel blowing her lovely blonde hair into a soft cloud about her face and her eyes crinkled into the special smile that she reserved for him alone. He held it up to the lantern. "Pretty picture. Come look."

She crawled over hesitantly and studied it in silence.

"Now get this," he said earnestly. He tapped the picture. "Mary. Belong me. All samee one person. Catch on?"

She giggled and nodded shyly.

"O.K., then. So you just lay off this 'keee' stuff. Mary good girl. You likum Mary. Me good boy. None of this rough stuff about us. We go church since little children." He measured from the floor to indicate little children. "Know Mary since she baby." And he cradled his arms.

She nodded vigorously and cradled her arms also, her face alight with a more intelligent look than he had yet observed. There could be no doubt about it: the famous Derwentian Elementary Yipyap and Sign Language had scored a signal, if somewhat tardy, victory.

"Oh, good girl!" he pronounced expansively, patting her hair and wiping the grease from his hand. "Now how about running home to your mama?"

But he had spoken too late. Outside there was a grinding crash; the floor shuddered, tilted, righted itself and Derwent felt as though he were standing on a moving belt. Seizing the lantern, he struggled out of the tent. Above the roar and clash of ice, the lonely howls of the Eskimo girl's dogs sounded, as only he could put it, "in mournful diminuendo."

For two days and two nights their private floe traveled eastward at a slow but steady glide. Snow squalls drove across the tumultuous ice fields, the floury powder lifting in long curving lines and filling the air with white darkness. The four dogs, their picket lines cut, huddled in the shelter of the snowpacked sledge.

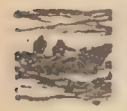
Derwent and the Eskimo girl sat in the Burberry tent and he shared his malted milk tablets and chocolate with her and she tried to share her blubber and fox meat with him. But while the Derwentian stomach twisted with hunger, the Derwentian palate remained aloof. In the presence of the head of the bearded seal, it could not do otherwise. Twice he attempted to lay his hands on the awful thing, to throw it overboard, to return it to the green depths. The first time the girl hit him with the fox's femur, which she had just picked clean. The second time she bit his hand.

"But there's no use saving the damned thing!" he protested. "He'll just blow up in your face when you try to eat him!"

From its throne on the pillow of his sleeping bag, the head of the Bearded One leered unpleasantly.

At daybreak on the third morning the storm ceased and Banks Island rose by

refraction above the ice, its round hills black against the orange sky. A north wind bumped them through a narrow passage to open water, they were picked up by a strong westerly current and commenced to double back toward Cape Kellett.



ON BOARD the *Jennie Q.* that north wind spelled trouble: it meant the ice was closing in and fast. Cap Ivorsen went off alone in the whaleboat to make one more search after warning the half-breed mate to up hook and get underway for Herschel Island unless the wind died down by three o'clock. Before he left, he explained that leaving the *Jennie Q.* stuck in the ice off Cape Kellett all winter would mean the loss of an important charter, while the sooner we got back to our plane, the sooner we'd be able to return and spot the missing meteorologist anyway. Meanwhile, as agent for old Nagakut, headman in the village, he presented us with a bill for the two dogteams and sledges.

A couple of hours after the skipper left, Tex spotted the Burberry from the crow's-nest. Except for the dogs, there were no signs of life on the floe. We calculated it would pass within three hundred yards of the schooner and tried to get that half-breed to start the diesel and intercept but he refused to get excited. He said these people spent a lot of their time drifting around on floes like that and we'd pick them up after we got underway.

The floe was almost opposite when the girl crawled out of the tent. When she saw us, she dived back in again, reappearing almost at once with that bearded seal's head in her arms. It was then that one of the Eskimos told us that it really belonged to her, that her father had sold it to Derwent when she was out fishing and that when she got home she was pretty mad about it. By now the Eskimos were lining the rail with the crew and when they saw that she had the head, they set up a cheer and the girl acknowledged it by putting on a dance. It was not a very nice dance; it was part bubble dance, part hootchy-kootchy, but mostly it was pure potlatch.

Up in the crow's-nest Tex put the megaphone to his mouth: "Huba-huba!"

That woke up Derwent and brought him out of the tent. At first he seemed awfully glad to see us and then he noticed the girl. By now the floe was passing the schooner a good half mile away but both Tex and I were sure we saw him blush.

"Oh, Derwent, you wolf in caribou clothing!" yelled Tex.

He was rewarded with the most derisive gesture known in the famous Derwentian Elementary Yipyap and Sign Language. And then J. Livingstone Derwent, III, stalked to the remotest corner of the floe, folded his arms across his noble breast and gazed haughtily, perhaps even hopefully, in the general direction of Siberia. Soon afterward, the skipper mercifully rounded a headland in the *Jennie Q.'s* whaleboat, towing an umiak containing a couple of Eskimos and the girl's dogteam and sledge.

FOR a while, down there in the *Jennie Q.'s* cabin, it looked like God's gift to the Atomic Age wasn't going to talk. Of course, Tex's first remark as he climbed over the rail wasn't exactly what you'd call pouring oil on troubled waters. Tex had looked at the girl as if he'd never seen her before and then he had looked at Derwent. "What kind of a bare skin did you say you were going out after, son?" After all he'd gone through, to be needled like that by a fellow-American was enough to make anyone clam up. So it was not until he'd finished his third plate of beans that he yielded to our innocent but persistent questions and told us the whole story. Or at least what he thought was the whole story.

"I'm still in the dark about that 'keee' business," he finished. "Right after the ice cracked up, she stopped saying it and never mentioned it again. You fellows have seen quite a bit of these Coronation Gulf people while I've been gone. You wouldn't know what she meant, would you?"

"Not me," answered Tex, giving the locker that parched look it had been getting from both of us for three long days and three long Arctic nights. Just then the door pitched open and Cap Ivorsen tramped in, followed by old Nagakut, bulking broad on his thick short legs.

"This here Nagakut my good frien',"

rasped the skipper. "So now you give him the ten dollars you promise his daughter when she go out on sea ice for key to w'isky locker."

"Don't be silly," said Tex blandly. "His daughter didn't bring us any key."

"That make no difference. She go find this feller like you tell her anyhow."

"In that case," said Tex, pulling out his wallet as he deftly moved out of the flight course of J. Livingstone Derwent, III's fourth—and uneaten—plate of beans. "Here's the ten dollars. And you might tell the young lady, on behalf of Captain Long and myself, that we feel she earned it."

It would have taken a bulldozer to cut the silence which descended with a thud upon the cabin after the skipper and old Nagakut had made their exit. But that 'dozer would have had to work fast, because they came right back in again with the girl. She approached Derwent dragging her boots shyly across the floor, eyes downcast and simpering. Without a word, Cap Ivorsen shot open the drawer of his desk and brought out an old Bible and an even older .45. At his grim nod, the girl sidled up to Derwent, confused and giggling. She took his limp hand tenderly in both her own and turned to the rest of us, made a solemn little speech.

"What's she grunting about?" asked Tex, suspicious.

The skipper's face was a wizened black cloud. "She say this is happiest moment in her life. She say it bring great joy to her heart to be able to marry this strong young feller who is more handsome than a Dog-Rib Indian."

J. Livingstone Derwent, III, reeled like a stricken musk-ox. He snatched back his hand and angled off across the cabin, exhibiting strong symptoms of battle fatigue.

"She say you promise to marry her," the skipper persisted with fire in his eyes. "An' if so, by God I see that you do! I been trading with these people for thirty years. They got thousand superstitions but they most superstitious about marriage. If you bust promise, you not only insult this girl and her family but all their souls and the souls of their ancestors. You make it so no white man ever safe in this country again."

Derwent found his voice and it came out as a frantic falsetto.

"That's impossible! I never said a word about marriage. How could I when I'm already engaged to marry a girl down in California? And I told her so. I even showed her Mary's picture and explained all about my engagement in her own language."

The skipper gave a nasty laugh. "What you mean you tell her in her own language?"

"He means that he told her in language that anybody could understand," Tex put in. "He's an authority on—communications."

"That's right," said Derwent. "'Mary belong me,' I told her. Then I showed her that I have known Mary Marshall since she was a baby. Look!" He cradled his arms and confronted the Eskimo girl. "Remember?"

Her face became suffused with color and she nodded eagerly, her brown eyes bright with happiness.

"Holy cow!" shouted Tex.

"It is lucky I hold record for reading marriage ceremony north of 62," said the skipper, a touch of pride mingling with his irritation. "My time is four minutes flat and in five minutes from now the *Jennie Q.* starts west before the ice pack catches her like in '35." He backed off and seating himself at the desk pulled out pen and paper.

TEX looked at the .45 and then at Derwent. "After all," he offered lamely, "It shouldn't be hard to have it annulled once you're back in the States, chum. And after a winter up here just think what you'll have to tell your grandchildren about life among the primitive Eskimos."

The skipper had begun to interrogate the girl, repeating her words and writing them down. "Kuparuk Memoranna Steve Illavarnik Olitok Joe Noashak Pammigbluk Nellie Seattle Jim Palaiyak—" He paused and looked up. "These Eskimos give their children the names of all their friends so that they will have many souls," he explained. "But that ought to be enough of her names for a dinky wedding like this. And now, Mr. Bridegroom, what's your full name?"

Derwent set his jaw. "I'm not talking," he grated.

(Continued on page 144)

PRAIRIE

ILLUSTRATED BY
FRANK KRAMER

PADDLES

By
CARL D. LANE

Louis Sac studied the torchlighted scene before him. He had two shots and he wanted to kill the two men who most needed killing.

THE STORY THUS FAR:

ALL the way from Covington to the Niobrara, the Upper Missouri valley is a trouble-ridden frontier—teeming with river pirates, waterfront scum burned out of Natchez-under-the-Hill, crooked Indian agents—but to HAINES BUTLER, pilot of the *Cheyenne Belle*, the murderous river life is all in the day's work till his cub, GIL NASH, whom Butler is training as a pilot, is needlessly killed in a clash with TWO KETTLES and his Blackfeet braves. After the death of Gil—brother of BEAUMELLE NASH, whom Butler still loves although she is promised to TELFER DOANE, a St. Joseph insurance agent—Butler vows to clean out the lawless river gangs whose systematic robbing of the redskins threatens to precipitate a bloody Indian War.

After conferring with EAMES HARRIS, owner of the *Cheyenne Belle* and several other river packets, and DANIEL PECK, Deputy Commissioner of Indian Affairs, Butler quits Harris' em-

ploy, on the pretext of dissatisfaction—actually to seek a job as pilot with Harris' rival, AMOS TABOR. Butler suspects that Tabor may be the brains behind the conspiracy to defraud the Indians of goods rightfully theirs under their treaty with the Government. Accompanied by his friend LOUIS SAC, a halfbreed hunter who has promised his help, Butler goes to Covington—"wickedest town in America"—where he finds MILO DUTTON, pilot of Tabor's *War Hawk,* and requests permission to go upriver with him as an "observer." Dutton, fearing Butler is after his job, consents reluctantly. Aboard the *War Hawk,* Butler tells Tabor he has quit Harris. Tabor needs a skilled pilot but he is suspicious of Butler's break with Harris. To test him, he dares Butler to take the wheel of the *War Hawk* and race Harris' boat, the *Dakota,* to the landing at Vermillion.

Butler accepts the challenge, wins the race—and Tabor's confidence. When Milo Dutton draws on him, Butler kills his rival pilot in the ensuing gun duel. And the *War Hawk* continues upriver . . .

Telfer Doane, outwardly a respected citizen of St. Joseph, is in reality sitting in on the high-stakes game that threatens the peace of the whole frontier. Since his engagement to Beaumelle Nash, he has tried to go straight—but he is too deeply involved with TINY BELDON, boss of Covington and the real brains behind the gang. Ironically, when the St. Jo Board of Aldermen votes to clean out the corrupt town of Covington, Doane is chosen to deliver their ultimatum. Reluctantly, Doane heads upriver on the *Eagle,* taking Beau and her sister, ESTHER, with him. Abpard the packet, he meets DAVID BLAIR. From Blair's shrewd questioning, Doane suspects him of being a spy, following a trail that will lead to Beldon, Tabor—and Doane. Panicky, Doane seizes his chance to push Blair overboard into the dark river . . .

Near the mouth of the Niobrara, the *War Hawk* —with Butler in the wheelhouse—pulls into shore, where the Mandan Indians have gathered to trade and receive their treaty goods from Amos Tabor. After inflaming the Indians with cheap whiskey, Tabor loses his head during the trading and shoots down the Mandan chief, CRAZY WOLF. With the Indians' valuable furs aboard but leaving nothing in return, Tabor gives the order to pull out. Aware that this will mean open war with the Mandans and all the surrounding tribes, Tabor's men turn against him. At gunpoint, Louis Sac takes Tabor ashore and mercilessly turns him over to the infuriated redmen. Butler takes over as boss of the *War Hawk,* and turns the boat toward the gang's main camp at Medicine Arrow.

Going to his cabin later, Butler finds Tiny Beldon waiting for him with a gun. The little man had come on board secretly at Yankton, downriver. He thanks Butler for disposing of Dutton and Tabor—but now, he says, he has no further use for the pilot. Summoning the Indian agent, MOSES PENNEL, and a burly bosun called SOD, Beldon orders them to take Butler away and not return until he is dead. Ashore, the two killers tie Butler to a tree—and Butler watches as Sod backs off and slowly raises his gun . . .

PART III

ESTHER BRAND and Beau exchanged glances as Telfer again excused himself. They were sitting on the top deck of the *Eagle,* on the side away from Covington so as not to be reminded of the revolting squalor of the shantyboat village which flanked the landing of the Montana Forwarding Company. Captain Johns had invited them to make the boat their home and had thoughtfully had an awning rigged for them. They were waiting, Esther was not sure for what or whom. But Telfer had told them that the man with whom he had business was away and that he must wait for him. Esther laid her crocheting in her lap and looked seriously at her sister.

"He's drinking too much," Esther said. "It's not like Telfer at all. Beau, what has happened to him—to you two?"

"Nothing," Beau said softly but she did not return Esther's gaze.

"Something has, Beau," Esther said. "He's different up here—restless, nervous; sometimes I think, scared. What's this business he's on, Beau?"

"I don't know. Insurance, I suppose."

Esther Brand watched the river's eternal flow for a long moment. She loved Beau. She was six years older than her sister and, when their mother died, it had been Esther who had brought Beau up. There was something that Beau should know and she had been debating for several days as to whether or not she should tell her.

"Do you love Telfer?" she asked now.

Beau did not answer at once. Finally, she nodded. "I suppose so, Esther. He's handsome, he's going to be a great man."

"Love," said Esther quietly, "is deeper than good looks and prosperity. Look at my Tom, Beau—he's homely as a wash boiler and only a clerk at the wagon works. But I love Tom, Beau—oh, desperately, my dear—and it's for what nobody but I can see and understand. I think the foundation of it all is respect. I think that you do not respect Telfer. Could that be it, Beau?"

Beau did not answer and Esther said softly, "Perhaps you half suspect what I think I know. Beau, on the night those Blackfeet raided the south end, a man gave my Tom a lift home. Tom had been

called, you know. It was Mr. Cordellier. He's on the Board of Aldermen—and he told Tom that the Board was considering wiping this wicked town off the map. I think that Telfer is carrying notice of that to whoever is the leader up here."

Beau turned her head away. "Please don't," she cried.

"You know then, Beau?"

"Yes, Esther, I know. Telfer is serving notice on that dreadful man, Beldon, or that Captain Tabor, to leave the territory. It's a dangerous thing for him to have to do . . . and he means for you and me to be his protection."

"Our skirts are wide, Beau," Esther Brand said and resumed her work. "Why did you come then? Your respect must have flown the moment you understood, dear."

"It did," Beau cried. "Oh, it did . . . and I thought it would return. But it hasn't Esther. Something has happened. He's been drinking; he's surly and hardly civil to us. I can't regain that same feeling for him. Esther, he hasn't even been touched by that awful accident to Mr. Blair."

Esther worked her needles rapidly. "I know. But why did you come, feeling the way you did?"

Beau looked up. "I had to. I had to see Haines Butler."

"About what?"

"I can't tell you, Esther—not even you. But that's why I have to bear this—this shame and insult. Please don't ask me about it."

Esther nodded. Nevertheless she asked, "Just one thing, Beau. Why didn't you choose Haines?"

Beau laughed mirthlessly. "He never asked me to choose him, Esther . . . Here comes Tel again."

Doane was immaculate as always, in fawn-colored coat and trousers. Only his face and his eyes showed the upset which pounded inside him. This waiting, this awful silent waiting! This inaction! He wanted Tiny Beldon to return from the Niobrara where Laid Hawks, his manager at Train and Beldon's said he had gone. He wanted to deliver to him those insurance policies and into which he would insert Eames Harris' notice of eviction. He wanted to know for sure about those records of David Blair's. Above all he wanted to go back to St. Joseph, where he was secure, where he counted, where Beau would not look at him as if he were a complete stranger.

He wanted to see Covington only once more as long as he lived—with good St. Jo citizens on his flanks and his own pearl-handled gun with the bullet marked for Tiny Beldon heavy and comforting in his shoulder harness.

"Tel, I wish you'd stop drinking. You started in before breakfast."

"I'm sorry, Beau," Doane said contritely, not meaning to. "I'm upset. I should be in St. Jo. There's important work there. It's this damned waiting."

"Can't we hire a carriage—or something? I'd like to get off this boat for a little while."

"No!" Telfer cried. "This is no place to sightsee. My man might return at any hour."

"All right, Tel," Beau said. "Just don't drink any more. Now, how about a hand of casino?"

He played gratefully, even graciously, and she felt herself draw nearer to him. But she knew that it would never be the same between herself and Telfer again. Esther was right. She had lost her respect for him. This one small thing, this one evidence of cowardliness, of fear, this one admission that he was not man enough to face and do a man's job, blanked out everything else that he was. Of course, she could not go on.

But she could do nothing about it until she had seen Haines Butler. Eames Harris and Daniel Peck had shown her the importance of Haines' knowing of their plans to wipe out Covington. After their visit, there had been no alternative but to accept Telfer's invitation and she hated herself for it.

She stood, later, with Telfer, in the brassy moonlight at the door to the cabin she shared with Esther. His hand was locked in hers and it felt hot. She wondered why. But then she remembered that heat and cold were relative and that perhaps it was only that her own hand was cold. This she could understand, for its coldness stemmed from her heart.

"Beau, is anything the matter?"

"No."

"This is Saturday, Beau. In St. Jo, you would have roses tonight."

She did not answer. He pressed her fingers but she did not press his in return. They stood watching the moon-flooded prairie stretching away from the dark river bank. An owl muttered in the hickories and below them a mudcat sucked in a grasshopper and spanked the water with his tail.

"Well, good-night, Beau. Kiss me good-night."

"Please . . . not tonight, Tel."

"I love you, Beau."

"I—oh, Tel, go away," she cried and ran to the door. "Please, everything will be all right back in St. Jo. Go now, Tel."

SHE closed the door against him. Esther was braiding her hair under the yellow lamplight. She had been reading her Bible and Beau could see it, opened to the hardy, militant Gospel of St. Paul, on the marble-topped table.

"Why aren't you in bed, Esther? You usually read scripture after you're undressed."

Esther smiled and looked across the room. "We have a guest, Beau—Captain Johns. He's been waiting to see you."

Johns moved to the edge of the velvet-covered platform rocker in the corner of the cabin. "I'm sorry, Miss Beau. I wanted to be away from the door. I shouldn't be seen here." Johns paused and looked at Esther Brand. "I must talk with you, Miss Beau."

"You can talk in front of Esther," Beau said. "Captain, do I detect perfume?"

"Pomade," Johns muttered and grinned. "But I assure you it doesn't mean anything, ma'am. I'm old enough to be your granddaddy, girl!" Johns chuckled in a pleased manner. "No, I come on serious business, ma'am. I want to know, have you seen Haines Butler yet?"

Beau looked at him levelly. "No," she said.

"Then it's likely true," Johns said. "I had word from Yankton that he was piloting the *War Hawk* when she went upriver. Ma'am, Haines Butler don't work that kind of a packet for either fun or wages. I had a feeling he was after something when he rode my wheelhouse last week. I—I came onto something that I think Butler is looking for. I want you to give it to him, Miss Beau."

"I must talk with you, Miss Beau," Captain Johns said.

"What is it, Captain?"

Johns placed a packet of documents on his thin knee and looked at her soberly. "These papers belonged to Mr. Blair. He asked me to keep them in the ship's safe. I did . . . and when he disappeared I took them out and studied them. It seemed," Johns shrugged, as if in apology for his reading private papers, "that they might throw some light on what happened to him."

"Did they, Captain?" Esther asked.

"They did!" Johns exploded. "Now don't ask me about it—because I won't tell you and I don't think you ought to read 'em yourself. I sealed them, Miss Beau. I want you to give them to Haines and tell him where they came from, please."

"Why don't you do it yourself, Captain?"

Johns studied the cartouche in the flowered carpet pattern a long moment before answering. "A man my age can't tell when his time may come, ma'am," he said softly. "I'm sixty-nine, come December. You just give these papers to Haines. He'll know what to do. You said you wanted to see him, didn't you?"

"Yes, I want to see him, Captain. Give me the packet."

It was a small bundle and Beau noticed that it was wrapped in cambric and sealed with wax. Johns sighed. "Keep it hid," he said earnestly. "Where are you going to keep it, ma'am?"

"In my portmanteau. Is that all right?"

Johns scrubbed his cheek with his palm. "Excuse me if I whisper to Mrs. Brand," he said with sudden embarrassment. "She's married, ma'am."

The captain cupped his hands over Esther's ear and whispered. Then, relief strong upon him, he put his arm around Beau's shoulders and pressed her lightly. "She'll tell you," he said. "I hope Haines comes back soon, ma'am. He's a pretty steady sort of man. Good night, ladies."

She closed the door after him. Esther was chuckling. "The nice old fuss," she said. "Beau, he wants you to keep the papers inside your corset. He mentioned that he doesn't wear them, the silly dear. They must be important!"

Neither Beau nor Esther could know just how important. But Johns understanding now who David Blair was and what he had been doing, knew . . . he knew that Blair had not met with accident or been a suicide but had been murdered. And he knew that whoever had done the deed would suspect written records and be looking for them. It wasn't completely fair to place them in the hands of Beau Nash. But that nobody would know. The murderer might come to him for them and he would fight, for all his years. The important thing was that they were placed in the hands of Haines Butler. Chuckling, the captain reckoned that Haines as good as had them. "Great Snakes!" he croaked. "Fifty years ago, she wouldn't be looking for me—I'd be looking for *her!*"

In their cabin, Beau and Esther, turned down their lamp and crept into the single-sheeted bed.

"Esther."

"Yes, Beau."

"I told you why I came up here," Beau said. "Why did you come yourself if you knew that—that Tel was shielding himself with us?"

Esther did not answer at once. She was thinking about many things and she realized that most of them added up to Haines Butler. She was thinking of what Beau must have meant to Haines. She was thinking of the night that Haines had said his congratulations to her sister and Telfer Doane and the awful defeated hopelessness in his face as he had moved unsteadily into the gaming room of the hotel.

"Tell me, Esther."

"All right, I think I came up here, Beau, so that you could see Telfer Doane the way he really is. You see, I never respected him, my dear."

CHAPTER IX

THE ELEVENTH HOUR

LOUIS SAC studied the torch-lighted scene before him. It presented a nice problem and there was not much time to solve it. They had lashed Butler to a fallen water-oak and Sod Hoyt was raising his gun. Louis moved softly in his shelter of brush. His rifle was a double; that gave him two shots and he wanted to kill the two of the three men who most needed killing. Obviously Sod was number one; he had the gun. Pennel, reasonably, should be number two.

He lined his sights on Sod for a body shot between the shoulders. Then he tried to forecast Pennel's most likely reaction and be prepared to swing on him. The other man, he expected, would run.

Sac convulsed his right hand, squeezing the trigger, not pressing it and so spoiling the alignment. He grunted in satisfaction when, through the puff of acrid smoke, he saw Sod drop his jaw and pitch forward.

Pennel and the deck hand had whirled and were facing him now. Louis re-sighted deliberately, taking his time, making no mistake. Moses Pennel raised his gun, uncertainly, searching wildly for the target. Belatedly he dropped to his knees for protection. Sac could see his forehead, white and shiny, beyond the front sight. But before he could squeeze the trigger, the deck hand swore and grabbed Pennel's gun; then swung it toward Louis' nest in the scrub. There was no choice now. The man saw him. Sac swung his rifle, steadied it and fired. The man fell silently, making only a soft slithering sound in the ooze and Moses Pennel cursed, pushed over the torch and ran. Louis could hear him crashing through the thicket in panic.

Philosophically, Sac reloaded. Then, with his bowie, he cut Haines free. "I cut out two horses from the wharf and stampeded the others. You got anything more to do around here before we vamoose?"

"Can you find your way in this swamp, Louis?"

"I tracked in worse than this," Sac grunted.

"All right, get us out of here."

Haines was grateful for the physical exertion of pushing through the dense growth of the boggy sink hole. It stifled the sudden overwhelming and almost sickening relief from tension which flooded his body. Long afterwards he was to remember that moment when Sod's gun had searched out his heart and paused in the flickering torchlight at the instant he had died. He plunged on, following Louis, certain that he would tremble violently if he ceased to move.

"Thanks, Louis," he said. "I owe you something I can't ever repay."

The hunter hitched his buckskinned shoulders in depreciation. "The only pay I want is for you to finish your job, Haines. I've been on the edge of Indian-white trouble ever since my Mam, who was half Mandan, first showed me God's great sun." Sac paused, then bent to squirm into a thick stand of reed. "Here's the horses. There's a trail from the wharf, leading over the island, across a ford and then it divides. I was scouting it—kind of for my own information—when I saw them herd you from the boat."

"The main trail leads to the camp, I suppose?"

Sac nodded. "I expect. The other one goes through the swamp and probably picks up a blind trail that meets up with the regular pack trace along the river. Haines, a man could easy touch off that camp. With all that whiskey, she'd be a buster of a blaze."

Haines laughed and spurred the pony which Sac had led from the swale. "I'd like to . . . but that would drive Beldon and the *War Hawk* up the river. I want him in Covington. We've got about everything we need on this gang now, Louis. It's up to Dan Peck to take the facts and move against them."

"Beldon showed up, huh? I was wondering how you got caught."

"He's been on board since Yankton. He was pleased with the dirty wash we did for him until he saw me cutting in on the main deal. His worry is who I am and who I'm working for. You can bet, I didn't tell him. He's top dog in this outfit, Louis—but he doesn't know our boss; though he can make a good guess. No; if we burned the camp, Beldon would light out just as Tabor was going to do, and we'd never get him. Peck wants Beldon, dead or alive—but I think he'd rather have him alive."

They crossed a marshy ford in open country, the moonlight pale and shadowless on the flat land. Sac dropped to the trail, and studied its powdery dust. "Not the camp?" he hopefully asked again.

"Not the camp, Louis. Pennel, I'm sure, told Beldon that there was a little trouble but that I'm dead and Tiny doesn't know I'm on the loose. That's a good way to leave it."

"It makes sense," Louis said and mounted. "But it would have been a dandy fire. All right, this way."

They were out of the swamp within an hour and picking their way toward the ancient buffalo trace along the Missouri which was used by the army scouts and Indians. Inland, twisting behind the washes and draws, was the main trail; an axle-wide scar over the sweeping, dipping land carved out by the mule wagons and caissons of the 2nd U. S. Cavalry. They held to the older, narrower path, swimming the creeks and backwashes. Toward daylight Haines was cooking a catfish which he had driven aground in a landlocked pond left by the falling river. He had found salt, rind bacon, coffee and rockahominy in his saddle bags; not much, but enough to last until they could reach an army post or Indian village.

His fire was of buffalo chips and twisted wisps of last year's grass. Sac, coming over the rise with the filled coffee pot, suddenly pointed and dashed the water over the fire. It sizzled to ash with a small hiss. "Hit the sod—the *War Hawk's* loping it downriver!"

They sprawled flat; glad that the horses were watering unseen at the pond behind the rise. The *War Hawk* was hooked up and the current powerful behind her. Haines could hear her exhausts sweetly chuffing and the inexorable beat of her paddle buckets. In her wheelhouse Jesse

Doran was spoking the wheel but in the middle window now was Tiny Beldon.

"God, ain't he a little shaver, Haines?" Sac whistled.

"Yes, but don't ever let it fool you. He's got more meanness in him than Amos Tabor and Pennel rolled together, Louis. I guess we're clear now. Look at that soggy fish! You better like rind bacon and greased corn, man!"

Sac threw the soft-fleshed mudcat two rods downwind in disgust. "I'd admire it considerable superior to 'cat, Haines. I ain't one of Boone's Kentuckians."

THE riding bothered Haines. He had never done much and he was in no way saddle seasoned. Nevertheless, they made good time and that night were at the mouth of the Niobrara, skirting inland to avoid the tepee village of the Mandans. They slept on the open prairie, bedded in dry straw and toward midnight, when it became chilly, Sac, shivering, brought the horses in close. He threw them expertly, their backs parallel to each other but separated by six feet. Then he looped a rawhide thong over the head of each, holding the horses' muzzles to the ground, hitched the thongs to stakes and threw the saddles over the heads. He crawled into the straw again, between the warm windbreaks. "They won't move. Some folks put a wagon tongue on 'em but I've held a horse down all night with a fair sized chunk of rock. Goodnight, Haines."

Haines slept dreamlessly. Of that he was glad. There was much to dream about, of how now to finally wipe out Tiny Beldon and his organization, of how to keep his promise to kill Moses Pennel, of this upper river—as beautiful as any part of the lower river—and his own part in taming it when steamboats of peace and trade and civilization would regularly wend its twisting turns. And of Beau Nash. His report to Daniel Peck would go through Beau. Would he visit her at St. Joseph; would he talk to her and hear her throaty voice again? He did not know. If the *Eagle* was at Covington, he could ride south on her. Otherwise, he would have to remain on the trail. He wondered if it would be better to write the report and send Pitty with it to Beau. Meeting her again would hurt; it would be like tearing open an old wound . . .

He awakened with a strange voice ringing in the graying morning light. It was a sing-song, loud and lusty and, in the pauses between installments of the song, he thought he could hear the sizzle of tobacco juice.

With Banner and Searcher I come,
An army true and strong,
To slay forever the hosts of rum.
O Throne, this is my song!

Louis Sac sat up. "Hello, Prophet."

The army true and strong, which was the Spittin' Prophet and his burro, halted. The old white-whiskered man let his feet touch the ground, taking his weight from the small sleepy animal.

"Sodden beasts!" he cried. "Sleeping away the blessed night in the fumes of Satan's green bottle! Arise! Arise, ye sots, ye whiskey-guzzling spawn of Belzeebub!"

"Take it easy, Prophet," Sac grinned. "We ain't drunk."

The Spittin' Prophet craned forward, his small fanatic eyes narrowed. Then he whooped, "Louis Sac, I'll be damned!"

He shook hands with Haines, not recognizing him. The breakfast fire was soon going and coffee, the Prophet's handful added to the common pot, bubbling over it. The old man was jubilant at the meeting. He said that he was after the *War Hawk*. "I got a notion where Amos carries them green bottles," he said slyly.

"The *War Hawk's* gone downriver," Haines told him.

"No!" There was disappointment in the voice, quickly over-shadowed by a pleasant memory. "Louis, you haven't shot an elk of late, have you?"

Louis shook his head. "That was turrible tasty liver juice from that other one, Louis," the Prophet said. "I don't know's I ever come on such nutritious liver before. It must be the season, hey?"

Sac laughed deeply. He'd seen Reegan spike the tin cup with whiskey too. But he sobered over his bacon and rockahominy. "You seen any Mandans, Prophet?"

"Yes, siree! Gents, them devils are headed for some blood-lettin'. Found-in-the-Grass sent smoke and he got Six Toes and Buffalo Nose to come into his camp—

all trigged out for war, by thunder! Some on 'em went upriver; they was followin' of the *War Hawk*. Well, gents—if they wasn't only Mandans, this could grow into a turrible dreadful war again."

"Even alone, they could cause a fuss." Louis nodded seriously. "Is Found-in-the-Grass liquored?"

"Alas," mourned the Prophet. "He is, Louis—sotted in it."

Sac saddled his horse. "I better stay around these parts, Haines," he offered. "I get along with Mandans. If they calculate to move south onto the settlements, I'll send word. I thought Tabor would satisfy them."

The Spittin' Prophet craned forward, his small fanatic eyes narrowed. Then he whooped, "Louis Sac, I'll be damned!"

"Perhaps they haven't found him yet."

"Huh!" Sac grunted. "What did you think my fire was for, to unchill me? They found him all right—but when you get the squaws of eight dead Indians yowling for revenge the chiefs can't settle for one fat white man. They'll be laying for the *War Hawk* when she comes up again—if they don't get impatient and cut loose on Yankton or Vermillion beforehand. I'll send word, Haines."

Butler watched him ride off with the Spittin' Prophet. Then he, too, saddled and wove slowly, cutting the river bends, to the southeast.

After another night on the prairie, he came presently to the Bluff of Bronze, above Covington, and, dismounting, carefully reconnoitered the sprawling settlement.

He could see the flat false front of the Pittsburg Emporium, and the only pitched roof in town, Beldon's Pacific Jumpoff. Beside the Montana Forwarding Company's washed red warehouse, he saw the *War Hawk* and between her neptune-crowned stacks, he saw another smaller stack. The *Eagle* was in.

Haines unsaddled and slapped the horse, watching it run free over the browning grass. Then, feeling trail-stiff, he walked a hundred paces off the trace and made a dry camp in the waning afternoon. "Horses never did suit me for traveling," he muttered. "Come darkness, old Johns will have a wheelhouse guest again."

LON KING, on his way uptown, hailed the only hack in Covington, sending it down to the waterfront and so, about nine o'clock of the evening on which Haines Butler was making an inconspicuous way to the *Eagle*, a carriage was drawn up beside the wharf of the Montana Forwarding Company. The driver waited sleepily, batting at night creatures, and presently a gentleman and two ladies came from the steamboat and got into the decrepit Moyer phaeton. "The hotel, please," said the gentleman, "and wait for us."

Arriving at the side door of the Pacific Jumpoff, the passengers could hear the noisy sounds of the hostelry. A banjo and fiddle screamed a frontier polka. From the gaming tables came the cries of the croupiers and over all was an overtone of buzzing man talk, and shrill laughter of the percentage girls and, once in a while, the bark of a bouncer. They could see, as the gentleman opened the door, the whirling, gaudy coloring of the milling throng.

The man nodded to a factotum. "A private table, please," he said and passed the burly man a bill, "and tell Mr. Beldon that Telfer Doane of St. Jo is here."

"Drinks?"

"Nothing, thanks. Wait—bring me whiskey."

"Tel, please."

Telfer shook his head in annoyance but did not rescind the order. "Where did Johns go, Beau?" he asked.

"I don't know. He said for a long walk on the prairie. Tel, that's all Esther and I wanted. You didn't have to bring us to this place."

"Business," Telfer shrugged. "It won't take a minute and then we can ride out on the prairie, Beau."

She nodded. The big lamp-lighted room reeked of stale smoke and unwashed bodies and the scent of coarse perfume overlaid the rankness. It was most offensive when the dancing couples whirled near them and Beau was glad for the open front doors. A cool breeze was blowing from the north, clean-smelling of conifers and mountain water and unseen snow-capped peaks.

"Doane! Why didn't you send word that you had ladies?"

Tiny Beldon was smiling beside the table, his face bland and babyish. He was gracious in acknowledging Telfer's presentations. "Join us, Tiny," Doane invited. "I have those insurance policies on that business you gave me—and thanks for it. I wanted them to reach your own hands."

Beldon nodded. "So did I, Doane." He laughed easily. "You weren't very prompt about it but I knew I'd get them—eventually. I'll look them over tomorrow."

"Better make it tonight, Tiny."

Beldon raised an albino eyebrow. "Why tonight?"

"Oh, nothing," Telfer said quickly. "I just thought—certainly, tomorrow will do. I hope you're sending the *Eagle* down in the morning. Frankly, I'm sick of your town, Tiny."

Beldon looked at him levelly. "It is a

man's town, isn't it?" he asked. "Well—the *Eagle* is almost loaded with such freight as we get south. Yes, I'll send her down tomorrow. Is Johns offering you line courtesies, ladies?"

"He's an old dear," Esther Brand said stoutly. "He's the most man I've seen on your boat so far, Mr. Beldon."

Tiny laughed delightedly. "I see we're keyed, ma'am," he said and looked amusedly at Doane. "I wish you a pleasant trip, ladies."

They rose. A fiery girl in shoddy crinoline relaxed her watch of Tiny Beldon and for the first time since her entrance looked at Beau with eyes that were not smoldering with jealous query. At the side door, Beldon bowed. "If you'll go to your carriage, ladies, please. I want just a brief word with Mr. Doane."

Doane wriggled. "The ladies are in my care, Tiny. Some other time."

"Now," Beldon muttered. "Old Charlie, your driver, is safe enough."

Beau and Esther were seated in the carriage before Beldon drew Doane into the hall. Tiny said nothing. With deliberation, drawing on his stogie, he thumbed the packet of policies. Telfer's belly pained. He had hoped to avoid this. "Twenty thousand of coverage. That seems enough," Beldon said finally, "Ho! . . . What's this, Doane?"

Tiny Beldon read the notice from Eames Harris with care. Then, rocking on his heels, he read it again. He suddenly laughed grimly. "So that's the reason for the skirts, eh?" he snapped. "Where do you stand in this, Doane?"

"I didn't vote for it, Tiny. That's straight," Telfer cried. "You can look up the Board's minutes. They elected me to carry it to you, that's all."

Beldon was holding the ultimatum with distaste. Doane though for a moment that he would explode into violence. But softly, his voice cold and hard, he said, "So they think they can throw me out of Covington, eh? Doane, carry my answer—tell St. Jo to go to hell!"

"There won't be much time, Tiny. I've been waiting for you. Harris will be here in two days."

Beldon studied the dancers for a long moment while the music screamed over the shuffle of boots, his baby face showing nothing, and Telfer thought that he had been dismissed. But suddenly he tore the notice to bits, scattered the pieces and turned on him sharply. "Captain Johns told me about Blair. Who was he, Doane?"

Telfer blanched. "How should I know?"

"You were the only one on board who might profit from his disappearance. Johns said he told you that he was an insurance man." Beldon looked hard into Telfer's eyes. "By God, man, I didn't think you had it in you. You must be desperate. I'll be wary myself from now on."

"The boat people think it was an accident or suicide," Doane said weakly.

"Don't make any slips, Doane, on your end of this deal. You'd better look for his records."

Telfer made a helpless gesture. "I've got to get to the ladies, Tiny."

Beldon laughed lightly. "What were they supposed to be—witnesses? Safe conducts? You're a fool to think I can't get you whenever I want you, Doane. Now stay here until I look those policies over carefully. You may be a good deal smarter than I ever thought."

OUTSIDE the Pacific Jumpoff Beau waited impatiently. She felt outraged and angry—angry with Telfer and angry with herself for so docilely playing his shield. She said so to her sister and, turning toward Esther, she was not aware of the man who eased from the shadow of the house-board building and stood beside the carriage and so was startled when she heard, softly, "Beau. This is luck. I was going to St. Jo to contact you."

She whirled. "Haines!"

Butler grinned, wanting to feel her warmth in a handshake yet not daring it. "Can we talk?" he asked.

Beau nodded. "Get into the shadow, Haines. Telfer is inside with Tiny Beldon . . . serving notice that Eames Harris and the St. Jo vigilantes are going to clean out this town. They gave ten days' notice and eight have passed already. Eames must be on the way."

Haines grinned. "How are you, Beau? I wish I could see you better."

"Please, Haines," Esther Brand said quietly, "listen to Beau."

She told him everything, quickly, yet missing nothing vital and when she had finished Haines let a soft whistle escape his

pursed lips. "This changes things for me, Beau," he said. "I wanted Eames to move in quietly and pick up Beldon and his head men and then see the evidence upriver. If I know Beldon he'll quit Covington and establish further up the Missouri—and we'll have the job to do over again."

"He wouldn't leave Covington, Haines. It's his town."

"It's getting too big for him," Haines replied. "He told me that his organization is topheavy; too many people in it and too many with ambitions. Tiny would love for St. Jo to do his housecleaning for him. It's a situation he would enjoy, Beau."

"What are you going to do, Haines?"

Butler laughed softly. "Stay around, Beau."

"What shall I tell Eames Harris?"

Haines considered for a moment. The final round of his battle with Beldon was looming. He wanted Tiny Beldon—to keep his trust with Daniel Peck and to forever open the river to steamboats of peace and prosperity. It had been open once, when the pioneer captains had perilously chuffed their small wheezing craft clear to the Montana but evil men had taken over the routes and stood now between the orderly expansion of an orderly America and the enormous wealth of the endless northwest lands. Yes—Beldon was the key. He must be destroyed. He must never again be allowed to establish and rule a Covington on the Missouri. Haines saw that clearly as the essential proposition and he said now, "Tell Eames that I'm holding to my orders—to bring back the top man. Have you seen the *Dakota,* Beau?"

"She passed us, going down. Captain Johns said she'd been damaged in an accident with the *War Hawk.*"

Haines chuckled. "It's nothing the engineers couldn't fix in a few hours." Then he said seriously, "Beau, you and Esther get away from here. Covington will fight. The Mandans, upriver, are painting for war. The whole river is dangerous."

"The *Eagle* goes tomorrow," Beau said. "We'll probably meet our people on the *Dakota,* coming up."

Haines said, "Good. But you and Esther keep on to St. Jo. Tell Eames I'll contact him—somehow—before he attacks."

Beau nodded. Then suddenly, seeing

Suddenly, seeing movement at the hotel door, Beau pushed Haines deeper into the shadows.

movement at the hotel door, she pushed Haines deeper into the shadows. "Tel is coming Haines. I—I have something for you, something from Captain Johns. Oh, Haines—I can't give it to you now. Can you come to the boat, later?"

Haines, too, saw the movement and Telfer Doane came striding to the carriage. He had just time to whisper "yes" and fade into the night. He heard Telfer Doane apologize for delaying them, then order the driver to ride into the prairie.

"I trust your business was successful, Telfer?" he heard Esther Brand ask.

"Very, thanks," Doane answered. "Beau, I'm sorry about this. But when we're married I promise never to let business enter our life together."

Haines, turning away, did not fail to notice that Beau made no reply. In an odd way, he took a comfort from it. Beau Nash was again strong in his blood. In all the tawdriness of Covington, even in

the darkness of the side alley, she had stood out with the clean purity of a single star in a black sky. But for him, she was as distant and remote also and Haines regretted the impulse which had sent him to her after noticing the waiting carriage. He had hurt himself by seeing her again. He should have written a note. But then he would not have learned about St. Joseph's coming attack. And he would not now be impatiently tramping the darker lanes of Covington killing the hours before he would again see Beau . . .

CHAPTER X

TOP DOG

COVINGTON was in its evening stride. Hard rivermen, prospectors, Indians, troopers on overnight passes paraded the hard-baked mud of the streets and alleys. Post wagons, saddled horses, a few travois and stevedore's carts cluttered the narrow gash between the false fronts on Main Street before it became the Ponca Road. Haines saw Reegan in the crowd, a painted girl encircled in his long thick arm, but Reegan did not recognize the tall pilot. He bought coffee from a street vendor, keeping to the shadows and presently he saw the carriage weave toward the waterfront and he made his way to the *Eagle*.

He had seen no sign that Covington had been alerted by Beldon. Did that mean that Beldon was not going to fight? Or did it mean that he would quit the town on the quiet and thus rid himself of the organization which was outgrowing itself? Haines considered that the *War Hawk* would supply the answer and he resolved to watch her.

He boarded the darkened *Eagle*. She lay, wooded to the guards and scattered downriver freight in careless heaps on the lower deck. Haines noted some bundles of skins and wondered if they were those which Amos Tabor had traded for whiskey from Crazy Wolf.

On the saloon deck, the rows of cabin doors stood closed and unlighted. He should have asked Beau her stateroom number. He paced the dark passageways once but no door opened. Then he climbed to the hurricane deck and knocked at Captain Johns' door. Through the ventilating louvres soft oil lamplight gleamed faintly.

A voice called, "Who is it?"

"Haines Butler. I'm sorry to bother you, Captain. I want to get the number of a stateroom, please."

"Just a minute."

Haines waited. Inside there were stirrings and finally the lock rattled and the door opened. A man stood silhouetted against the orange lamplight. "Hello, Haines. I was reading. Johns isn't here."

It was Telfer Doane—and Haines thought that he was acting too friendly, too agreeable; as if he had been interrupted in something. Haines made no pretense of friendliness. "What's the matter with your own cabin?" he asked.

Doane laughed shrilly. "Johns has the best lamp on board. What was it you wanted?"

Haines, his eyes sweeping the cabin, let the excuse stand. But, if Doane had been reading, why was the lamp on Johns' bedside table and its tin shade tilted so that the light fell fair on the small safe which was built into the joiner work? Why was there no reading chair within the circle of lamplight? He said now, not wanting Doane to know that he had been looking for Beau, "What's the number of Howard Nathan's room. It should be on the passenger list."

Telfer thumbed the worn day book. "Nathan isn't listed. He probably hasn't come on board yet. Anything else?"

Over Telfer's shoulder Haines could see the list. Directly above where Doane's finger searched the N's was the name, Nash. Beau's cabin number was A-4; that would be starboard side, forward. "No nothing else, thanks," Butler said. "Good night."

Haines dropped down one deck. Then, pausing so that Doane would reveal himself if he was following, he slipped silently into the starboard alley and knocked at A-4. The door opened a small crack and Beau whispered, "Here it is, Haines . . . a packet of documents of some kind. Captain Johns said that you would know what they meant. He was afraid of keeping them for some reason, even in the ship's safe. They belonged to Mr. Blair who was lost from the boat coming up."

"Who was Mr. Blair, Beau?"

"A passenger, a quiet and refined gentleman. Teller bid him good night on deck four evenings ago and nobody has seen him since. People think it's an accident—or a suicide. The pilot says he must have been aft, he did not see him near the wheelhouse."

"Thanks," Haines said and took the packet. "I'm glad you're getting rid of these."

There was an odd waiting silence between them as if they were both thinking of the words which could not now be spoken. Haines could again feel her warm nearness and smell, like the delicate bloom of plantation wisteria off Memphis in June, her walnut-brown hair.

"Thanks again," Haines said uneasily. "Good night, Beau."

"Haines!"

"Yes, Beau?"

She made a soft choking sound, then whispered, "Haines, please take care."

"I'm lucky, Beau," he smiled.

"Perhaps it isn't all luck, Haines."

"Then what is it?"

"Perhaps it's the good wishes—and prayers. Of your—your friends, Haines. Esther always remembers you after her Scripture reading, Haines."

"And you, Beau?"

"Of course, Haines!" she cried softly. "We're friends! Aren't we?"

"Always," Haines said. "Good night, Beau."

Butler left the packet. In a tent under a poled whiskey keg on the bank beyond the shanty boats, he read the papers which Beau had given him. As he scanned them he forgot his drink. Here, in neat script, backed by fact, was the defrauding scheme which Louis Sac had guessed at. Everything was there; everything but names and Haines could supply them now. Beldon, Tabor, Harmon, a man named Laid Hawks, who he knew ran the Pittsburg Emporium, and Telfer Doane. Yes, Doane was in it too. He found it difficult to believe that, even now. But it must be Doane. Else why had he been trying to open Johns' safe an hour ago?

Haines pocketed the packet and bolted his whiskey. Doane—why Doane had a motive for causing an "accident" to David Blair! Obviously Daniel Peck would want Doane, too. Obviously, he was part and parcel of Beldon's organization.

IT WAS almost midnight and the stars stood clear and brilliant over the vast flatlands which swept from the muttering river. Nevertheless, Haines retraced his steps to the *Eagle*. He received no answer to his knock on the captain's cabin door this time. But the door was unlocked and he stepped inside. He wiped a lucifer, quickly thumbing the passenger list. Telfer Doane—Cabin B-7. He grunted in satisfaction. Then, catching a gleam of steel in the fading match, he took Johns' Colt from the bureau, spun the barrel and slipped it into his belt. He had underrated Doane. To continue to do so might prove dangerous.

In the larboard alley, he knocked on B-7; lightly, so as not to awaken Doane's neighbors.

"What do you want?" Doane's voice was sleepy.

"Open up. I'm from Tiny Beldon," Haines said softly.

After a silent minute the door opened a few inches. Haines' boot was in it instantly and his gun barrel pressing into Doane's chest.

"Back in," Haines whispered. "I'll shoot you down if you raise your voice, Doane. Back in—now, make a light."

He kicked the door shut and Telfer Doane, in a dressing gown, was bending over the lamp. Wordlessly, Haines searched under the berth pillow and pocketed Doane's pearl-mounted gun. "What's the meaning of this, Butler?" Doane rasped, "You're not from Tiny."

"I'm giving you a chance. Now, get dressed and pack your bag. You're getting away from this territory and you're never coming back. Get moving, Doane. I don't go around making idle talk behind a six-gun."

"You better explain. My friends in St. Joseph won't let you get away with toughy tactics on me, Butler."

"You'll have no friends in St. Jo if they hear about your little insurance deal with Tiny Beldon—or about David Blair. I've got orders, Doane—Beldon's crowd, dead or alive. I'm not fooling."

Telfer smiled a sickly grin. "I never took you for a damned government spy, Butler."

"Spies report, they don't do things. I'm doing things. Now get dressed."

Doane moved about the cabin with deliberation, dressing with all the care of a man going to a social function. "Wear your boots," Haines cautioned. "You're walking."

After awhile Telfer laced his carpet bag and wordlessly faced Butler. Haines held the door open. "Leave the boat quietly. I'll be five paces in back of you. Go up to the bank, cut across town behind the Jumpoff and walk out the Ponca road."

"What then?"

"Keep walking—but never back to the Missouri, Doane. I'll kill you if I ever see you again."

"I'd like to tell Miss Nash."

Haines swore softly. "Walk, Doane. If it wasn't for Beau Nash and her good name, I'd turn you over to the St. Jo sheriff. She's the only reason you're getting this break."

"You still think you have a chance with Beau?"

Haines pushed him along the alley. "If I did I'd shoot you a mile outside of town. You can write to her from wherever you settle. She'll never know about you from me."

Covington was quieting down; the street brawlers crawling into the lighted places. Haines followed the dark figure of Telfer Doane with long swift strides. At the Ponca road, Haines filled a bottle with water at the public well and silently handed it to Doane. The nearest settlement was twenty-two miles away over the prairie—a long dry tramp. After that, Haines supposed, his money would ease his traveling.

He halted his prisoner when Covington lay a half hour behind them. Then he broke Doane's gun, scatted the bullets in the carpet bag and handed the empty gun to Telfer. "Wolves might bother. You can load after I've gone," he said. "Remember what I told you. I'm opening up on Beldon and his outfit. There'll be nothing to come back to."

The moon had risen lemon yellow from behind the river cliffs and it washed Doane's face now with a ghastly light. He wavered, his bag in one hand and the other hand seemed to seek Haines'. Butler motioned him on his way with his gun. With a desperate shrug Doane began to move down the rutted wagon road.

"So long," he called and added bitterly, "Top dog!"

"Back in," Haines whispered. "I'll shoot you down if you raise your voice."

Butler watched him go. Oddly, he felt no hatred, no active repugnance for Telfer Doane. Even now, it was difficult to believe the evidence against him. But the evidence was cold fact and no mistake had been made. There was a chain of crime stemming from Doane and, Haines thought bitterly, he was as much responsible for the killing of Little Gil as for the murder of David Blair. Yes, Doane too, like Tabor and Dutton, was a rung in this ladder which he was climbing.

At the Bluff of Bronze, Butler turned off the Ponca road and found his camping site of the afternoon. Saddle, blankets and possible sack were in the tall grass where he had left them. From the bluff he could watch both the *War Hawk* and the Missouri up which the *Dakota* would steam. And, until the *Dakota* arrived, his job would be merely watching.

He rolled in his blanket, wishing for the warmth of a horseflesh windbreak. He thought again, as he fell asleep, about this ladder. Only it was no longer a ladder. It now was a single rung, high-perched; all the other rungs had been kicked away and he and Tiny Beldon must fight one last desperate, deciding fight for this remaining single rung.

The only question was when and where.

DOANE pulled his belt tighter, grateful for the pressure. He held himself flat and shadowless against the board siding of the Pacific Jumpoff, directly outside Tiny Beldon's office window. It had been a long, hurried tramp in from the prairie and Telfer tried to quiet his breathing. He gripped the pearl-handled gun in his pocket hard. Butler had been a fool to return it. He would use it on no wolves. He would use it on Tiny Beldon; then, after he had made him open that ship's safe, on Captain Johns. Then let Butler accuse! Beldon dead, Blair dead and his reports destroyed, Johns dead . . . there would not be a scrap of evidence against him!

This would be all, this would be final, Telfer told himself as he waited. *Once and for all he would destroy that link to the past which Beldon had forged; then live as he wanted to live, a free man, respected, married. . . .*

He was sorry about Johns. But Johns, like Blair, would have to die.

"Just this and I'm forever clear," he told himself in self-comfort. "Just this and I'll never have to burn inside again."

Inside the hotel the fiddle had ceased its endless monotonous polka rhythm. The bouncers were clearing the place, ejecting the drunks forcibly, and the girls, giggling, tripped off with burly men. One by one, the batteries of ceiling lamps were extinguished. Telfer could hear the big front doors slam shut, then the tinkle of empty bottles being dumped behind the stables. Presently Covington lay dark and still under the high eastern moon and only the dim Seneca oil lamp in Tiny Beldon's office burned on.

Doane peered cautiously about him. There was no one in sight. With a quick leap he crawled into the open window. He had his gun out now, weaving on his feet in Tiny's small office. But, as he had expected, the room was empty. Silently, he glided to the shadow of a high chest and waited. Tiny would soon come. This is where he counted the night's earnings from the bar and tables . . . and Telfer meant to take back some of the dollars which Beldon had pressed from him all these years. Dollars and Beldon; that was all he wanted here.

Shortly, he heard footsteps. They paused outside the door; then the knob turned and the door slowly opened. Telfer held himself steady, waiting for the close of the door. But it did not close. He heard heavy breathing and smelled the strong stale body smell of a riverman.

He felt himself go panicky. It could not be Tiny Beldon. Beldon smelled of pomade and he breathed silkily, like a child, and his walk was as light as a puma's. But the man was coming toward him and Telfer raised his gun. In blank despair he saw his final plan failing . . .

He could do nothing effective now, nothing but shoot and run and he let his thumb slowly pull back the gun hammer.

But from the open sash a soft voice suddenly cut into the evil waiting quiet of the room and Telfer whirled in new despair to meet it.

"Let the hammer down, Doane—gently," Tiny Beldon was saying over his gun. "You wouldn't shoot Moses, would you?"

"Tiny!"

"Who else, man? You didn't think that I misread your wild eyes this evening, did you? I told you I'd be wary. Stand away, Moses . . ."

"Tiny! Don't! Oh, God, don't shoot! I only came to warn you. Butler is closing in on you; he's government, Tiny—"

"You lie, Doane. Butler is dead."

"I saw him, Tiny. An hour ago!"

Beldon laughed softly at the wild pleading voice. Slowly and deliberately he brought his gun to Telfer's agonized stomach.

"It hurts in the belly, Doane. I want it to hurt," Tiny said, coldly. "You've tried to quit me, you've lied, you came gunning for me. Like Amos Tabor, you've become too big for this outfit. Doane, you have earned this."

"Tiny! Not in the stomach! Please . . .!"

Beldon fired; the angry scarlet flame licking Doane's flowered vest. Telfer

gasped and clutched his belly, grabbing to tear out this final searing pain; then sagged slowly to the floor. There was bleak unbelief in his handsome face but he made no cry. All the slack lips muttered was the odd word, "Cordellier!" and then Tiny Beldon fired twice more; savagely, viciously because these bullets were speeded by hatred and he had no fear of Telfer Doane's face haunting him, and Doane became a limp mass, arms still wrapped, pressing, about his belly, beneath the yellow flood of lamplight.

Tiny vaulted into the room, sheathing his smoking gun.

"Bury him, Moses," he said. "Take him outside town and bury him."

Moses Pennel growled, "All right. But first you tell me why you sent me in here on a damn fool errand. He nearly got me."

"You were covered all the time, Moses," Tiny Beldon said coolly. "I was watching for just this from outside. But I wanted you to see how I kill a man when he gets too smart."

"You can't get along without me," Pennel cried quickly.

"That's what Doane thought, too, Moses. Now get rid of him."

Moses Pennel shrugged and turned, heading toward the stables.

"Pennel!" Tiny called. "One more thing. Is Butler dead?"

"Dead and buried in swamp mud, Tiny."

"Sure?"

"Sure, Tiny."

"Good! I'd hate to think you were lying too. You see what happens to liars. Good night, Moses."

Tiny Beldon crossed the great empty hall, a small cherubic Napoleon. At the door he passed a tenner to the night man. "Clean up the mess in my office, will you, Ben? . . . Say, Ben," Tiny asked, "what does Cordellier mean?"

"Dunno, Mr. Beldon," Ben muttered behind his cob pipe.

"If a man said it before dying, Ben? 'Cordellier'—like that."

"Dunno. Maybe a curse, Mr. Beldon. It kinda sounds like one."

Tiny nodded. "Or a prayer, Ben. There's not much difference between a curse and prayer in this business. I'm sleeping on the *War Hawk*. Good night, Ben."

CHAPTER XI

GEARED FOR WAR

BUTLER extinguished his screened breakfast fire before the dawn came to reveal its smoke. In the first light of the orange sun, he was prone in the lush grass on the summit of the Bluff of Bronze, studying the morning chimney smokes of Covington. They told him nothing. The town slowly awakened; men moved on the streets, and along the waterfront a few wagons rolled. Four troopers, riding hard, galloped off for Vermillion and a woman fished from a bull boat over a mudcat hole off the flatboat town.

Presently the wagons, loaded now, returned down the bank road toward the Montana Forwarding Company warehouse and were hidden behind the screening bulk of the *War Hawk*. By timing them, Haines estimated that they were draying from the Pittsburg Emporium. That could mean normal loading operations. On the other hand, if it continued—and if the warehouse were emptied also—it could mean something quite different.

Fight or run? Defend or quit? Beldon's decision would calendar the action and motives of these final days in Haines' fight for a decent river and honest steamboating. About mid-morning the *Eagle* vomited brown chunk smoke and shortly her sailing bell clanged, her paddles drummed and she swept down the river, the current strong behind her. In her place came a woodboat, poled by flatboatmen, and the corded wood began tumbling onto the *War Hawk*. But all through the long hot day, Beldon's packet made no smoke; only the wagons continued to arrive loaded and retire empty. In mid-afternoon, they ceased, congregating under the shade of a single cottonwood tree and the teamsters opened the warehouse loading doors. Haines, estimating the tonnage, was sure that this was no normal loading. By his count and the freeboard of the packet, Haines guessed that she had loaded upwards of two hundred tons of freight.

In the early dusk, he made his forecast. Beldon was preparing to pull out. Nothing that he had seen indicated a defense of Covington; everything that he had seen indicated that Tiny Beldon would let St.

Joseph pare down his organization with gun and flame while he, upriver and with a few picked men, would commence anew his evil mastery of the Missouri.

It was full dark when he at last stood erect and descended to the river level. Tomorrow was the tenth day. Eames Harris would not be far away. But tomorrow might be too late. Beldon would leave before the attack. That was a reasonable supposition.

And a reasonable time to leave would be at the crack of dawn . . .

Once again he stole through the back alleys of Covington, heading for the shantyboat village on the waterfront. He tried to scout the Montana warehouse but a toughy warned him off. But he had seen what he had come to see: there were lazy waiting fires under the *War Hawk's* four horizontal boilers. She could make steam in an hour.

Haines crossed the wharf and slid into the dark passage between two flatboats. Under the thin plank walkway, the river gurgled and he smelled again the strong fermenting odors from beneath the boats. Here he froze, letting his eyes adjust to the night, and finally they showed him that for which he had come to the river.

Noiselessly, he crossed the short decks of three boats and dropped to the slimy shore. The bull boat which had been fishing off the bank that morning was grounded here and Haines cautiously launched it. Wading beside it, he pushed it downstream. Once off in the river blackness he climbed into the boat and took the single hand-whittled paddle.

In the manner of the Indians who voyaged only downstream in the frail reed and hide craft, he let the current do the work. In five minutes he could no longer hear the screech of the fiddled polka or the street cries which had marked Covington and he was alone on the roily, flowing river. He drifted for something like two hours, paddling 'cross current to remain in the swiftest water, before he began to look for Desolation Island. Behind Desolation, if he were Sam Patten, was where he would moor the *Dakota* to a deadman for the night . . .

He veered the bull boat into the west channel, staying close to the sandy, planter-spiked shore of the long island. Here the current was swift and the river rolled like a rapids, and the boat shot silently southward. Emerging from behind a rank sprouting planter, Haines saw a single light ahead. And at the same time he was aware of a singing in the air, as of swarming bees. That would be the straining hawser to the deadman. Silently he drifted down to the wraithlike white bulk of the steamboat and in a moment was vaulting to the guard of the *Dakota*.

He noticed with satisfaction that she was geared for war. Her cordwood had been stacked outboard, in tiers, army style, to protect the boilers and engine from gunfire and loopholes had been left for riflemen. The wheelhouse, he remembered, was plated with boiler iron. Filled fire

Haines cautiously launched the boat and, wading beside it, pushed it downstream.

buckets stood in rows inboard of the cordwood and from aft came the voice of a man singing a trooper's campfire ditty. Walking aft, he was suddenly challenged from the main stair casing. Haines laughed. It was good to hear that voice.

"Tom Brand . . . Hello! It's Butler."

"Haines! Doggone, you had me scared, man. I'm not used to this vigilante work."

"You'll get used to it, Tom. Are all the boys out?"

"All but the sheriff, Haines." Tom grinned. "We had to send him south to serve some papers or something—this isn't the official law, you know. There are sixty-five of us; and twenty more on the *Eagle*."

"Tom! The *Eagle* isn't in this. Why, man, Beau and your own wife are on her."

Tom Brand laughed easily. "Johns won't mix in the fight. He's promised. But he hailed us this afternoon and offered to stand by. He's got a notion that Beldon will skedaddle on the *War Hawk* . . . said she was loading too heavy for an ordinary trip."

"The old coot." Haines laughed. "Tom, he's guessed more than most of us know. Where's Eames Harris?"

"Upstairs, Haines."

"On a steamboat it's aloft, Tom. You'll have to ship with me and get some river talk into your head when this is over."

Seriously Tom Brand nodded. "I'd like to, Haines—steady. I can clerk on a packet as well as in a wagon works."

BUTLER found Eames Harris, Leander, Peck and Cordellier in Patten's texas cabin, the blinds drawn tightly and the room smoke-filled. It was a staff meeting. War talk was in the air. "Miss Nash said to expect you, Haines," Eames Harris said. "Bring us up to date."

Haines recited his experiences and when he had finished Daniel Peck whistled. "One of the annoying things about the law," he said, "is that we must get the evidence first; then the criminal. You've got everything, Haines; now how about Beldon?"

"I'll get him—if you push north at once, now."

"We could," Harris agreed. "You seem all fired sure he'll go into his camp on the Medicine Arrow if he quits."

"He thinks he'll be safe in there," Haines said. "Outside of his own men, nobody knows that channel except myself . . . and he thinks I'm dead."

The meeting broke up near midnight. By then there was steam blubbering at the safeties and they had agreed upon the plan of attack. Haines himself, in the middle window again, gave the order to cut the hawser; then sent down his bells for full speed.

Slowly, her grasshopper spars moving against the stars, the *Dakota* chuffed against the current and wound up the river. Haines felt with gratitude the familiar things, the worn elm wheelspokes, the smooth brass of the speaking tube mouthpiece; the solid good purpose of these earnest men who sat on his settee. At the first turn of the paddle he knew that Blackie Niven was handling his steam. Below, on the hurricane deck, the same two howitzers which had covered Two Kettles and his braves on his own *Cheyenne Belle*, now poked their short muzzles into the night wind. He remembered with distaste the wheelhouse of the *War Hawk* and its evil smells; of Amos Tabor, drunk and truculent, of Milo Dutton, breathing his rage and his hatred. And he remembered another wheelhouse, also. But he put its memory away from his mind. After tonight, the river could never again reach into a pilot's throne and serve death to an innocent boy who would know its secrets and be its master . . .

"What will Sac do with the Mandans, Haines?" Harris asked from the darkness.

"Keep them happy. I don't know how; Louis has the Indian mind, Eames. Mostly, he'll try to keep their war from spreading."

Forward, the leadsmen chanted their depths. The twin exhausts chuffed softly, like giant cats purring in the lap of the stars, and below, the St. Joseph men moved silently to their loopholes. Haines ordered spare hawsers readied on the foredeck and, with Harris, made a round of the ship. He was ready to attack.

"*Eagle* is hard in our wake, sir."

"Signal her we're slowing down," Haines told the mate. "Sam, cut the engines. Covington is around the next bluff."

The purr faded now to a kitten's breath and the bow wave lost its snarl and white crest. Like a ghost, like a thing without

heart, the *Dakota* moved silently across the current toward the waterfront of Tiny Beldon's wild town. There came no alarm, no challenge. Covington was asleep. A few lights burned in the village but the Pacific Jumpoff was quiet and the *War Hawk* revealed herself only by a single grease torch flickering over her bow.

Butler headed first for the flatboat nest. To him it was the personification of the evilness of the place. A hundred yards offshore he rang for steam.

The packet bucked, sucking down her stern under the surge of the quickened paddle, then shot ahead. With a loud, splintering crash, she butted her broad bows into the tinderwood flatboats. Two capsized into the river; another lay crushed against the clay bank. From them tumbled sleepy men . . . and immediately their guns began speaking.

"Take your party ashore, Cordellier!"

Half of the St. Joseph men dropped to the shore before Haines backed off. Again he rammed the flatboats. Already the torches of the party were spreading fire. On the bank, now, Covington was rallying to repel the invaders and a bitter gun duel was shaping up. Haines nodded to Tom Brand. It was time for the howitzers.

Their flat savage bark was added to the din. Lights were coming on in the hotel and a bewildered watchman at the Emporium was frantically gathering in the dancing clothing.

"Next time we go in get a hawser to some piles!" Haines shouted and Blackie Niven cracked his throttle savagely.

The packet crashed into the *Eagle's* old berth, laying it against the *War Hawk*. It choked off the gunfire which was coming from Beldon's boat for a moment; then brought it with renewed force. Sparks were erupting from the twin stacks of the *War Hawk* and Haines knew that she planned to move. Above her, on the bank, the tent village was burning like autumn leaves.

"Hawsers rigged, sir!"

"Stand away!"

The *Dakota* was firmly laced to the Montana Forwarding Company warehouse now. Haines spoke into the tube to Blackie; bells could not say what he wanted. Before he snapped the mouthpiece shut, the paddles thundered. The great vessel strained against the two hawsers, fighting fiercely for the purchase which would topple the building into the river. Slowly, she chewed into the Missouri, spewing muddy bottom, quivering at her leash. A man swung an axe at a pile; then hastily retreated as the great building rocked.

"Once more, Blackie! Sit on your gate!"

With an agonized wrench the warehouse surrendered and collapsed into the Missouri. Haines heard the cheer of the *Dakota* men—and with it sudden savage gunfire from the bank.

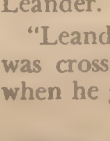
"Back her off and secure hawsers," Haines cried. "It's time to get after the *War Hawk*. Sam, where's the *Eagle*?"

"Just off our quarter. Old Johns is trying to bottle up the *War Hawk*."

"Tell him to stop, the old fool," Haines shouted. "She's twice his size. He's got passengers on board!"

But there was no time to worry about the *Eagle*. They were again moving toward shore, paralleling the *War Hawk*. The gunfire crackled between the two boats in a steady staccato beat. Larboard howitzer boomed and Haines saw a hole appear in Beldon's nigh chimney—glaring red from the flame sweeping up the flues. On the *Dakota*, a man screamed and Tom Brand, from behind a sand bag, yelled for Doc Leander.

"Leander's dead," Sam Patten said. "He was crossing the deck to pull a splinter when he got it."



THE main town was aflame now. Horses screamed on the bluff. A few riders and wagons careened out the Ponca Road. The Pacific Jumpoff still stood, its houseboard walls painted in flame. But as Haines watched, the blacksmith's shop collapsed against it and red fire greedily entered the rupture. He jumped on his whistle treadle. If he could recall Cordellier's party, surround the *War Hawk*, he would have Beldon and his ringleaders and it would be over.

Behind him Harris' pistol barked.

"They're getting ready to pull out, Haines!"

Frantically Haines threw his rudders in an attempt to foul the *War Hawk*. But the Montana packet's wheel was turning and men were creeping toward her hawser with axes.

"Try for her wheelhouse, Tom!"

"They've stacked cordwood around it."

Nevertheless, Tom's howitzer blazed and the ball ploughed a furrow in the texas roof. Tom Brand paused in his reloading. "Get the *Eagle* out of there, Haines," he cried. "If the *War Hawk* gets loose, she'll sink her!"

Haines picked up his speaking trumpet, thoroughly worried. Johns was completely happy, he knew. The old man loved this. But he had passengers; he had Beau and Esther on board. "Get out, Johns," he bawled. "Get away . . . *War Hawk*'s hooked up!"

But even as he warned, he heard the sharp ring of axes and the snarl of severed taut hawsers. With a wild free lunge the *War Hawk* sprang from the wharfboat dock and speared straight out from shore—straight out to the *Eagle,* just showing the plume of belated motion at her exhausts. Haines whistled a sharp warning. But the *Eagle*-lacked headway and could do nothing but await the vicious ram of the great, freight-heavy *War Hawk*.

The packet bucked, sucking down her stern under the surge of the quickened paddle, then shot ahead. With a loud, splintering crash, she butted her broad bows into the tinderwood flatboats.

Haines backed off his own boat. Below him a bullet mashed itself against the boiler armor. He fired at the flash, one hand spoking the wheel, and heard the sharp crack of his gun turn into a long, gurgling scream.

"They're after the pilot, Haines," Eames Harris said. "I'll cover you . . . "

Harris' words were choked off by the crash of the two boats. The *War Hawk,* like an arrow released, rammed the *Eagle* fairly in the midship waist. Her bow bit deeply, showering splinters, tearing into the spindly superstructure with the odd sound of a player riffling cards. Then the scene was clouded in hissing steam from ruptured lines, the *War Hawk* thundered in her backaway and the little *Eagle,* gurgling at her great wound, settled swiftly to the river bottom. She rested on the sand, her lower deck submerged and freight cases and cordwood popping to the surface to be swept downriver and Haines could see her people climbing to the canted river-lapped hurricane deck.

"Stand by to take them off!" Haines cried and sidled the *Dakota* gently toward the wreck.

"*War Hawk's* licking it upriver, Haines!" Patten reported. "You'll lose her."

Eames Haris grunted, "Our own first, Sam. Haines can get the *War Hawk.*"

The rescue did not take long. Tom Brand ran a landing stage to the *Eagle,* as if she were merely a wharf, and Johns' passengers and crew filed on board. Haines, holding his vessel steady, could hear Tom's joyous cry: "Esther! Beau . . . Thank God!"

It took less than ten minutes. Johns' engineer and six of the roustabouts did not appear. Lon King had a rifle slug through his neck and would probably join them in Mother Missouri before morning. The wreck shone lurid and red-washed in the light of burning Covington, like a painted warrior slain in battle, and Haines backed away with a sadness in his heart. She had been one of the decent honest boats; she would be missed. But already the *War Hawk* was churning upriver, lightless save for the showers of sparks which belched from her tall chimneys and Haines, calling for high pressure, knew that he would have a hard fight to catch her.

"It's a hundred and fifty miles to your Medicine Arrow," Eames Harris said. "Can you catch her before she gets there, Haines?"

Haines nodded. "I think so. But I don't

want to. Eames, do you think that Beldon could have recognized me?"

"Probably not . . . gun smoke, exhaust steam, darkness. No, I doubt it."

"Good. If he saw me, he'd go straight upriver because he knows I could follow him into the creek. He'd go straight up, burning the woodyards and we'd have to chop four hours out of every ten. No, I'll make a hard show of chasing him—and Tom can keep throwing his howitzer fire at him—but I'll let him sneak into the Medicine Arrow."

Daniel Peck, reloading his gun, agreed. "That'll round them up neatly, Haines—the *War Hawk,* the camp, Harmon, Pennel—probably Telfer Doane, too. I'm sorry about Doane—for Miss Nash's sake, I mean."

Haines did not enlighten the commissioner. Doane would straighten up; away from Beldon he would find a new life and someday he would explain to Beau and ask her to come to him . . .

Haines listened to the periodic boom of Tom Brand's two guns. Far ahead, the *War Hawk's* paddle echoed between the cliffs of the river canyon, her path still marked by the spewing of wood sparks. A thrown torch arced shoreward from her, a tiny flame kindled under the bluff and by the time the *Dakota* was abreast, a woodyard was blazing ruddily, staining the sky here as the flames of Covington stained it far downriver.

"I suppose the boys have Covington cleaned out by now," Eames Harris speculated. "We'll pick them up as we go down—if we go down. Coffee, Haines?"

Haines drank gratefully. He was tired. The false dawn was paling the eastern horizon and Sam Patten knew the river here off Vermillion as well as he. He surrendered the wheel and the chase at six and slept fitfully on the wheelhouse settee.

It was past noon when Patten shook him. "The *War Hawk* has swung into the Medicine Arrow, Haines. We need you. But first take a look at a little souvenir from the Mandans."

Butler followed Patten's finger. On the larboard beam, suspended from a lightning-riven oak was a handless and footless corpse.

Patten, shuddering, asked, "Do you suppose they did it before or after they killed him?"

It wasn't a pleasant sight and Haines fought back sudden nausea. "Before, Sam," he said. "The Mandans were terribly sore."

"It should signify to Tiny Beldon, seeing Amos Tabor like this," Patten said and looked away. "You want the grasshoppers rigged, I suppose."

"Yes. And tell Tom to save his fire until we move in on the *War Hawk.* This is the last fight, Sam. We'll sail back on a clean river—or we won't sail back."

He found Eames Harris and together they inspected the packet and the preparations for attack. The log bulwarks had been reduced during the run and now stood only about four feet high. Blackie Niven had been chunking her, all right! In the freight clerk's office, Lon King still lived, stretched on a cot—and Beau Nash tended him. She smiled at Haines, guiltily. "Don't remind me that you gave me orders to go back to St. Jo." She touched King's wan face defensively. "I'm glad we—we disobeyed, Haines. I think Mr. King will be all right."

Haines was serious. "So am I, Beau. Poor Doc Leander was supposed to do this. There may be more."

The bosuns were readying the great grasshoppers now and Johns was superintending the building of a log barricade around the winchman's station on the foredeck. The slow bell crashed and the beat of the paddles diminished; then it suddenly became cool and dark as the *Dakota* entered the narrow tree-grown mouth of the Medicine Arrow creek.

"Pilot!" The word passed through the *Dakota.* "Haines Butler aloft! The ship is yours. Take her in!"

CHAPTER XII

BOARDERS AWAY!

LOUIS SAC sat his horse dead across the old buffalo trace trail which skirted the Missouri below the Medicine Arrow. He had ridden hard from the junction of the two streams but he estimated that he was ahead of Found-in-the-Grass and Buffalo Nose who jointly commanded the two allied Mandan tribes. He waited with assurance, listening to the distant boom of Tom Brand's howitzers. Frightened swamp

A mounted van scout appeared on a rise, studied the sweeping land and swiftly rode, hand upraised, toward him.

birds flitted southward and a buck elk herded his does through a draw, away from the two chuffing monsters which had invaded his stamping ground. Nevertheless, Louis was relieved when a mounted van scout appeared on a rise, studied the sweeping land and swiftly rode, hand upraised, toward him.

Sac too raised his hand in greeting. "Your eyes are keen, my brother," he said. "You are well named Mighty Owl."

"The Wihio did not choose to conceal himself," the young Mandan said modestly. "If he had, I would not have seen him."

Louis accepted the compliment silently and unhurriedly filled his cob pipe. Sharing its smoke with the Indian, he said, "Return to your chief, Mighty Owl. Tell him that there is no need to march south to his enemies for his enemies have come to him. You have heard the Wihio cannon speaking on the river. You have seen the birds flee from their swamp nests. It is as

I have told you these four days. Destroy the camp which I have shown you and there will be no need to destroy the Wihio villages to the south. All the evil of the Wihio is now within the borders of the great swamp."

"These are wise words," the Mandan nodded. "Our medicine was not convincing, the signs of victory were few. Nevertheless, it was decided to attack the villages because we must live with honor to ourselves."

"Burn this camp," Louis Sac said. "Let no one escape. But first take your trade goods; take what has been stolen from you. I speak for those whose villages you would destroy to avenge yourselves upon the few evil men among us."

"We wish only for the peace we have agreed upon," the scout said.

"Tear out the evil then, O Mighty Owl," Sac said. "This peace is written in the very hearts of those who remain. You are a great warrior. You are leader of the young men. Your chiefs will be guided by you. War will only bring the Wihio army upon you. It will bring suffering and sadness. It is an ancient saying that it is foolish to kill the whole herd if only one pony is crazy."

Mighty Owl considered soberly. "It is a wise saying. We shall return to the swamp and destroy the camp as you counsel."

Louis watched him ride back to the main body of the Mandans with relief. He wished that he could be with them. Ever since he had skirted the camp trail with Haines Butler he had been dreaming of the blaze which Beldon's hideout would make. The whiskey would blaze the hardest—if the Indians let fire reach it.

He plunged now into the swamp edge. After a few rods he whistled softly; there was a rustle nearby, the bray of a burro and the Spittin' Prophet emerged from the bush.

"Get after the Mandans, Prophet," Sac said. "They're going to burn Beldon's camp. There'll be whiskey flowing."

The Prophet spat wrathfully, "Oh, no there won't!" he cried. "I'll personally stove in every bar'l. I'll bust every damn green bottle, by Great Habakuk, I vow it!"

"Good," Sac said. "Mighty Owl's tracks lead nor'west along the trace."

The old preacher threw his long leather-stockinged legs over the burro and switched the animal into plodding motion. His quavering voice rang joyously.

With banner and searcher we come
An army mighty and strong . . .

Louis Sac slapped his horse away and plunged into the hummocked swale. Beyond the brush, from deep in the heart of the swamp where the creek twisted in tortuous evolutions, he heard the hot breaths of the two steamboats. The boats were nearing the shallows now and Louis listened to the scream of the tackles as the grasshopper spars were planted and the lifting strains as the winches hauled the tremendous dead-weight aloft. At the crescendo of the scream there was a portentous silence; then the jolting crash and splash as the boats lumbered painfully forward, the cries of the crew and again the hot chuffing breaths pervaded the dank swamp. Sac was reminded of the death battle between two infuriated bull bison which he had once witnessed. Only there was something horrible, something repulsive in this ponderous deliberate fighting of the two ungainly, awkward creatures of wod and iron which trampled the earth. He waded the bog and presently came to the Medicine Arrow. Here he climbed a tree and when the *Dakota* drew abreast on her clumsy mechanical limbs, he dropped lightly to her deck. He made for the wheelhouse.

He looked down upon the scene of the moving struggle. The stern of the *War Hawk* was slithering into the dark leafy tunnel of the main channel, water wheel thrashing, exhausts stuttering. Puffs of smoke, from rifles, spat from her after windows and Sac, more used to musket fire, heard the angry scream of slugs on all sides. The *Dakota* was lifting again, like a man straining in his very guts; then collapsed forward and Tom Brand's larboard howitzer boomed. A monkey ladder on the *War Hawk* exploded into splinters and the rifle fire replied, spitefully and savagely. Louis took the rifle from Eames Harris, carefully aimed and fired. A capped head behind the sash sill vanished.

"The Mandans will take the camp, Haines," Sac said. "They'll let the settlements alone—if you clean out this crowd."

Haines smiled a smile which he was not

feeling. Around him were wounded men. The chief bosun hung still over his log bulwark at the winch, like a gaudy shirt drying on a deck rail. Harris had a ragged glass wound in the meat of his shoulder. Jimmy, Blackie's striker, hid a mashed face in bloody hands. He would entice no more girls to the dark decks of a layover evening. He wondered about Beau and her rude hospital. But men came from it with fresh cloth bandages and took up their guns again and he supposed she was unhurt. So far . . .

THE creek was straight and deep here and Haines made his bells demand steam. The great vessel charged into the thick watery growth, fetched binding ooze under her flat hull, and sucked to a jarring stop.

"Grasshoppers!"

The enormous spars speared into the swamp bogs, sought firm footing; then began again the awkward lift and hinge. It was as if two giant-legged insects, drugged to sluggishness, were gyrating crazily in an arena of grease; never contacting, never meeting to deliver the final blow of death for one of them. Haines braced himself to the crash, saw the spars suddenly become lifeless dragging limbs. Automatically, as if he would do this until the end of time, he passed his bells and the paddle thundered.

"Smoke, sir! There's fire ahead!"

Louis Sac whooped, "That's the camp, Haines!"

Smoke ghosted above the trees, filtering cinders to the decks, and from far away came the war cries of Mandans. The *War Hawk* understood the smoke and cries, too. Her fire left off, briefly, but quickly was renewed. Completing a hop, she veered suddenly from the deep channel and commenced a frantic waddle through a feeder creek toward high prairie land. Into the momentary broadside she presented, the howitzers poured their murderous charges of boiler rivets and scrap iron. Almost instantly she was gone behind a swamp island and only her chimney smoke, mixing with the yellow smoke of the burning camp, showed where she moved.

Haines, too, veered his boat. The *War Hawk* was vulnerable for boarding only by the flat forward deck. Astern, her paddle and her solidly cabined decks protected her—as a stockade protects a frontier post. And now the *War Hawk* was making for land, seeking to spew her people into the tall prairie grass and escape . . .

Haines flipped open the speaking tube. "I'm cutting inside her, Blackie; this side of the island she rounded. Close your safety valves—I want two hundred pounds pressure!"

"She'll blow boilers at one-eighty, Butler!"

"Two hundred," Haines growled. "I've got to lift her fifteen feet next time."

Blackie's fire door clanged and his barrel of resin became a dense cloud of gaseous, ochre smoke belching from both stacks. The packet trembled with the enormous dangerous pressure as Butler rammed her savagely into the mud bar which streaked across the waterway. Again he cried for the grasshoppers.

The spars were bending to the awful strain; the winch engine coughing as it chewed up the slack of the tackles. Slowly the screaming lower blocks crept up the spars; slowly the *Dakota* reared her length into the air—until her bow brushed the trees and men could not stand but must lie on her canted decks.

Blackie Niven crawled to the foredeck, shaking his blackened fist. "For God's sake, Butler, stop it. You're playing with hell!"

"Up!" Haines trumpeted to the winch. "Up!"

The packet teetered on her spindle limbs now, swaying ominously thwartships, but still Butler stayed the hand which would call for the paddle and release. Expertly he estimated the bar. It was shallow; a three-hopper ordinarily. But Butler had no time for extra hops now. The plume of the *War Hawk* was moving rapidly behind the island; she was free, dashing for solid shore.

Behind him the safeties were silent, choking back the terrific mounting steam pressure. It was as if a huge angry beast were holding its breath, conserving it for the one final lunge to battle and victory. Butler, feeling the accusing eyes burn on him, looked levelly down upon the stuttering winch engine. A man would be a fool to remain near the boilers. Yet Blackie Niven must . . .

"That's all, Butler! She's driving me crazy!"

"Up! Stand by your throttle, Niven!"

Butler watched the tackle blocks crawl to their mid-air meeting. He heard them tick together.

"Two blocks, sir!"

Haines' hand did not tremble. Steadily, deliberately, he rang one bell; deliberately he crashed the jingle . . . and, the exhausts spat their mighty pent-up roar into the sky above the trees, the *Dakota* strained forward under the fierce paddle beat, fell upon the river and slithered forward through the slime and ooze. With a quiver she cleared the bar and dashed swiftly down the narrow feeder and in a long, waiting minute came bow to bow with the charging *War Hawk*.

The howitzers blazed. Sac, directing the rifle fire, made life in the *War Hawk's* wheelhouse hazardous. Haines spoked his wheel, delicately, like a marksman aiming a sporting gun, and behind him Blackie Niven's engines cried their straining pressures in a hymn of battle.

"Destroy her, Butler," Eames Harris breathed beside him. "We're fitted with collision bulkheads and will float. I'll gladly build a new bow."

"I figured so, Eames."

Haines fired as he steered. Tiny Beldon himself spoked the wheel of the oncoming *War Hawk*, his bland baby face creased now with hatred. Beside him Moses Pennel covered him with a Colt and Jesse Doran, his head bandaged, served a pathetically small saluting cannon on the texas room. With deliberation, Louis Sac shot at Doran. "I only winged him, Haines," Sac grunted and hauled back the gunbolt. "Doran is the kind to talk. I expect Peck will want to have palaver with somebody."

"Hold on! We're ramming!"

In fascination, with a queer impersonality, Haines watched the water between the two vessels narrow. The snarling bow waves merged, blanking each other. Beldon, his nerve suddenly gone, rang a frantic reverse—then the packets touched, crashed into each other and their bows disintegrated in a rain of timber and scantling hail. Deep into the *War Hawk's* flimsy superstructure the *Dakota* ploughed, spewing the wreckage of herself and her adversary into the swamp waters. Deliberately, Haines withheld his stop bell, grinding the *War Hawk* into the root-snagged bank until she lay on her bilge turn and began breaking along her timber backbone.

"Boarders away!" It was Tom Brand, rallying the *Dakota* men on the foredeck.

With a wild whoop, they jumped onto the *War Hawk's* canted deck and charged the freight case barricades. Haines stopped his boat then. He reloaded his gun and slid to the lower deck. Captain Johns, leveling an enormous antique 4-gauge duck gun from behind the cordwood breastworks, eyed him sourly. "So that's where my gun got to, Haines!" Then the old man fired and cackled in glee. His shot had blowned a ragged hole through the freight clerk's lower deck office and exposed Ally Reegan crouched within. Reegan's hands promptly sought the sky and Tom Brand flung him aft to the *Dakota*.

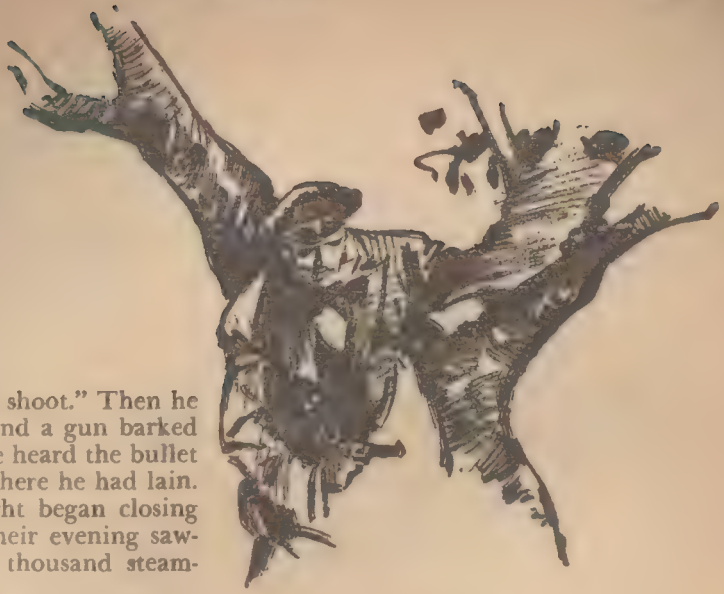
Haines crept forward, using the wreckage as a shield. Beside him a Colt barked and Louis Sac swore. "Missed him! That was Beldon, Haines. He and Pennel lit out for shore when she touched. Come on, the boys can handle the boat fight."

THEY jumped to the shallow bank, fighting their way into the tangle of rank willow and alder brush. Inshore, Haines could hear the crashing progress of Beldon and Moses. Sac, like an animal, stalked them, wasting no steps or effort. The gunfire and man-calls of the fight left them and Haines drew himself onto the first dry ground they had come upon.

"Recognize it?" Louis asked wryly.

Haines nodded. It was the hummock to which Pennel and Sod and the deckhand had marched him to be killed. "It's an island, kind of," Louis said. "They've gone into the bushes ahead. Fight 'em from here, Haines. I'll flank."

Over them rolled the thick tumbling smoke of the burning camp and the setting sun was staining it a somber bloody red. A frog croaked in the creek behind him and, far off, the bell of the *Dakota* was beating in victory. Haines studied the thicket across the clearing, behind the fallen log to which Sod had bound him. There was no wind; yet he saw a small hazel bush sway. Haines, on his belly,



In a crotch of a gnarled water-oak sat Moses Pennel and his gun was aimed at Butler's heart.

called, "Come out or I'll shoot." Then he hitched to the left . . . and a gun barked across the clearing and he heard the bullet spit into the soft earth where he had lain. Haines waited. The night began closing in; insects commenced their evening sawing around him, like a thousand steamboats cutting cordwood.

On his flank, Louis' gun cracked and from the swamp came a shrill, blasting curse. It was Tiny Beldon's voice, at last uncontrolled, a wild, frantic animal cry. Haines fired twice at the sound. "Come out, Tiny. The game is finished," Haines called.

Beldon groaned from his leafy hideout and a wild aimless shot skittered through the brush. Then Beldon spoke and curiously it was not to Butler. "Pennel! I knew you were lying. Pennel, where are you? You said you killed him, you said you buried him. Pennel . . . damn your soul! Pennel! I'll kill you, I'll kill you . . . "

Then a prolonged breathless silence crept into the clearing and Beldon spoke no more. After a long time, the insects took up their night songs and Haines wriggled carefully forward. He had moved twenty feet through the underbrush when he heard, from almost directly above him, a soft chuckle. He froze, then whirled. In a crotch of a gnarled water-oak sat Moses Pennel and his gun was aimed at Butler's heart. "Stay where you are," Pennel was saying. "That's all I was waiting for. Tiny is dead and I'm taking over. I'm his key man; I always was but the fool never understood it. I'm boss, Butler, boss —except for you. But this time you won't get away. Here—don't call Sac! Put your gun down and stand up."

Haines stood up, leaving his gun on the ground. Moses, on his sly face a broad grin of relish, slipped to the ground and faced him. "It was never any of your business, Butler," he said, enjoying the moment. "Not what happened to your cub, or what was happening on the river up here. You came looking for this . . . now you're going to get what you came for."

Haines watched Moses' gun hand rise slowly. It paused at his midriff and Pennel, wagging the gun, gave voice to a sudden recollection. "It's where Doane got it, Butler," he grinned. "Right in the belly—tore him to pulp. But it was Tiny who had that pleasure. This is mine—all mine!"

Only Pennel's eyes stood out in the twilight darkness now; only his green, kill-crazy eyes. Haines watched narrowly. The man was possessed, tasting and retasting the pleasures of this moment and Butler only then realized how much Pennel had feared and hated him. Perhaps . . .

"You could pray, Butler," Pennel laughed. "You could say how sorry you are for making the mistake of gunning for Moses Pennel. You could—"

Haines kicked at the gun hand, throwing it upward; then fell heavily against Pennel's shins. In the split second that Pennel took to recover his balance, Haines wiped his own gun from the ground. It cradled into his palm, not yet cooled of

his own body heat and his thumb arced back the trigger. Its muzzle met the rising muzzle of Pennel's gun, not two feet separated. Haines stepped nimbly to the left. Then he fired.

Pennel's gun flashed and its bullet bit lightly into Haines' forearm, like the sting of a hornet, no more . . . and Pennel clutched his throat, spun half a turn and with a tired sigh pitched to the ground.

Haines kicked the oustretched gun hand cautiously and the gun came away from the nerveless fingers. Moses Pennel was dead—his black blood was blotting lazily into the soft swamp earth and across the clearing Louis Sac was calling, "You all right, Haines?"

Haines called back, "Yes. Pennel's dead. Where's Beldon?"

"Here," Sac said, "but he ain't quite dead. Dan Peck can have him any way he wants him. Tell him so, Haines."

"Where are you heading for, Louis?" Haines asked.

"The camp," Sac said. "I reckon Found-in-the-Grass and Buffalo Nose have cleaned it out. Now they can have the *War Hawk*, too. I don't think they'll bother the settlements—but I'll stay with them until the whiskey's destroyed. I'd like to hunt for your boat, Haines."

Haines was across the clearing. "I haven't a boat, Louis."

"You're going to have one," Louis said earnestly. "This is kind of your own private river up here. Harris is going to build a new packet and run regular service to Fort Benton. The whole territory will open up now. Your name is on the middle window, Haines."

"I'd be proud to pioneer the upper Missouri, Louis. What's her name?"

"Dunno," Sac shrugged, "but it would please these tribes considerable if you called her *Mandan*. After all, Haines, this river and this land is theirs. They're happy to welcome us and our steamboats—provided we come in peace and with honest hearts." Sac held out his hand. "I want to help; you're both my people. Well, so long, Haines."

Louis Sac parted the bushes and was silently gone. Making his way back to the *Dakota*, Haines felt his going keenly. Sac was right. This was Mandan land and Mandan river and their white brothers held it only in trust for them; never to despoil it; never to exploit it, always to hold and defend it as common ground and common highway for all.

The cook's triangle was beating the supper call when he reached the flare-lighted *Dakota*. Daniel Peck had fourteen prisoners and Jesse Doran had already talked. Peck shrugged when Haines told him that Tiny Beldon was lying wounded in the swamp. "We'll fetch him in, of course," he said, "but it would be just as well for him if he died now."

Haines ate lightly. It would be a long, hard race downstream in the darkness with the wounded. And he would have no cub to relieve him.

Yet, as he telegraphed his bells an hour later, it seemed that Little Gil was again with him in the silent wheelhouse and he had only to whisper an order to hear the bubbling boy-voice whoop and joyously spoke the great wheel: "Larboard a spoke, sir, aye, aye, Mr. Butler!"

But it brought no real peace and comfort to his heart. He had fought so hard and won so much. Yet that which he wanted above all else would not be his.

OUTSIDE the Court House, Cordellier gravely shook hands with Butler. St. Joseph lay bright and clean under the prairie stars and from a docked steamboat on the river drifted the plaintive harmony of a roustabout chorus paced by a sad guitar.

"It wasn't so bad, was it, Haines?" Cordellier asked.

"No. I enjoyed it. With Eames Harris president of the Aldermen and so much to do. . . . No, it's an honor to serve with you men. It—it sort of gives a man roots."

"We'll meet again next week, Haines. Wise and careful government is all this country needs now." Cordellier paused and regarded Haines with a twisted smile. "Roots, Haines—that's the essential thing; roots, solidity, a base for a man's life, for his community's life. Marriage helps, Haines. Always when I meet with the Aldermen, when I consider the job we have to do, I think of it in terms of Mrs. Cordellier and the children. We have four, Haines. That's one reason I'm working so hard for a university here. I'll walk a spell with you—I want to lock up the store."

They strode down the board sidewalk, their footsteps sharp on the new boards. Cordellier hummed a small tune; then left off, breathing deeply. "The river, Haines. Smell it—kind of good and clean, isn't it? Next year you'll have a new boat on it, I hear." Again Cordellier turned that twisted smile upon Butler. "Haines, where is Telfer Doane?"

Haines made six steps before answering, "I don't know."

"Would you like to know?"

Butler liked the little man. Always Cordellier, when he had sold him those rich blooms of another year, had represented the solid, upright participating citizen that he himself wished to be. Now Haines shrugged and said, "Yes, I'd like to know. Moses Pennel said something before he died—but Pennel was nothing but a liar and a braggart."

Cordellier said softly, "Doane is dead, Haines."

"How do you know?"

"I found a new grave in Covington, the night we cleaned it out. I don't make mistakes about—about things like that. It was Telfer Doane. Three gun-shots in the stomach, Haines. Pennel was not lying. I thought you'd like to know."

"Yes," Haines said slowly. "I'm glad to know it."

Cordellier drew up before his small store. His night lamp was burning dimly above the iced flower case. He drew a key ring from his velvet waistcoat pocket and twisted it in the lock. "The *Eagle* brought up some fine blooms," Cordellier said carefully. "Early asters, gorgeous pinks; even some courting flowers—though they're terribly high just now."

"Roses?" Haines asked.

"Red roses." Cordellier suddenly put his small hand on Haines' shoulder and laughed. "Haines, don't torture yourself. Miss Nash knows."

"They were engaged, Cordellier."

"Perhaps not as much as you think, Haines," the little man said earnestly. "Mrs. Brand showed her sister the truth, I think. Eames told her about Telfer—not the whole horrible story, of course—but she had the right to know. The roses are forty dollars, Haines—but I'd like to give you this bunch."

"Thanks, Cordellier," Haines muttered.

Outside the door the two men shook hands with deep mutual respect and Haines walked slowly up the slightly rising street toward the Nash house. He felt oddly at peace—as if the roots of which he had talked were already becoming firmer, stronger, more solid. A light still burned in the front parlor and Haines could hear the fairy tinkle of a piano.

He stood tall before the ruby glass of the front door. Once he had led a little boy from this door; a little boy whose soft hand left his own to grasp the hard smooth elm of wheel spokes and there, long after, had again become soft. Once, too, he had left with the thrill of another hand, lightly touched, lightly pressed, strong in him.

He turned the bell knob and the piano music ran off to a high, single note that quivered in the air and matched the music that was within him.

"Haines! I'm so glad to see you."

He stuttered awkwardly: "It's late, Beau. But—but I had to come. You see . . . "

"You don't need to, Haines," she said gently. "Come in. Oh, Haines, roses!"

"Cordellier named them courting flowers, Beau," Haines said. "I like to think of them as that, too. Beau! Oh, Beau—I'm so clumsy! Just hold the roses like that. Just stand there, Beau. I'll—I'll think of how I want to tell you . . . "

Beau pressed the roses to her face, the starlight red through the ruby glass full upon her, making her one with the flowers in which was the heart of Haines Butler. She laughed softly, like that sweet note of the piano.

"Don't think, Haines. Don't talk. Just kiss me, Haines . . . "

The roustabout song faded to the beat of paddles on the Missouri. Haines and Beau could hear it, one with the chuff of the exhausts, far down the St. Joseph channel, off the Horny Hem Planter . . .

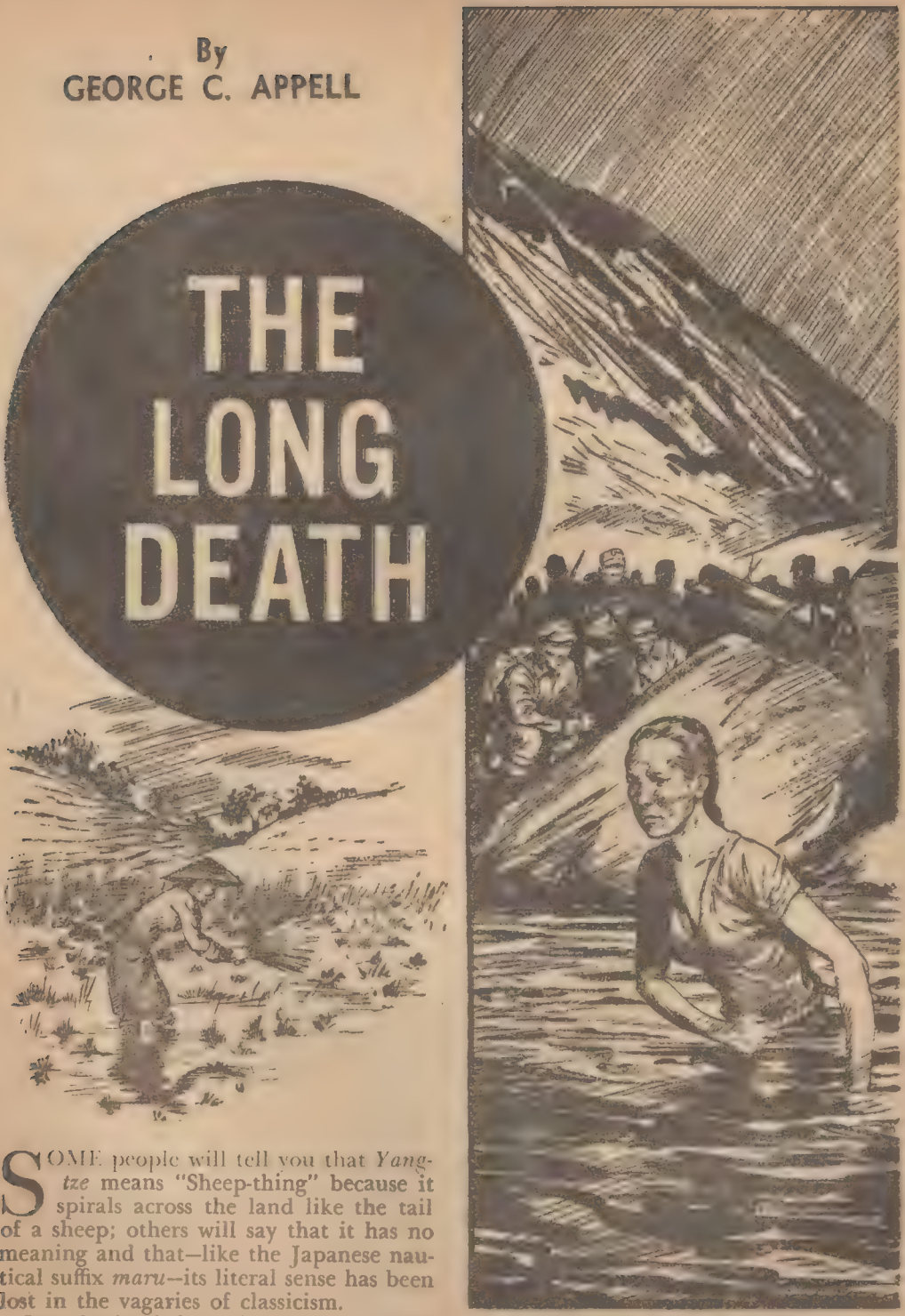
Prairie paddles,
Beatin' up the long, long stream.
Prairie paddles,
Thumpin' to the song o' steam.

. . . and the river became still and its peace crept softly through the night toward Beau and Haines.

THE END

By
GEORGE C. APPELL

THE LONG DEATH



ILLUSTRATED BY MONROE EISENBERG

SOME people will tell you that *Yang-tze* means "Sheep-thing" because it spirals across the land like the tail of a sheep; others will say that it has no meaning and that—like the Japanese nautical suffix *maru*—its literal sense has been lost in the vagaries of classicism.

But viewing it from the slopes of a misty bank, it looks like the hard, gray gush of

She walked into the river like some misshapen goddess on sacrifice bent.

a mammoth artery pumping its silt to the sea; and up there they call it the Long Death. In the hiss of a stinging rain we stared at it, and our thoughts were of ghosts rising and weaving, taking shape in the mists and mocking us onward. I shivered. Sweeney said he wanted to go home.

The 1st Battalion was already bunching up at the ford below, and the others were pressing in from behind. Many Chinese officers indulge in the sanguine luxury of permitting their men to crowd together; they think it offers security to be close to one another in moments of peril. Yet the surest way to offer a target to a trained enemy is to show him a tight group. With one shell, he can blow it to hell. True, there were no Japanese sighting on the column now, but soon there would be, and it would be too late to learn. So the battalions bunched up at the ford, and the soldiers squatted in the sand and waited to be ordered on.

THE river ran strong here. It was deep and cold and wide. We had no boats. Beyond rose the folds of the north country, goat country, pathless and broad on the central plain. A fine place for a ford. I asked Major Hu about it.

"Boat landing," he chirped. "A place for boats."

There weren't any boats now.

Chen stamped down to the muddy banks and swaggered to the river's edge. He glared at everyone. He called Major Hu.

"Do you think or not think rafts are good?"

The major looked indifferent. "If we had rafts, rafts would be good."

"Division made no arrangements?" Chen looked shocked.

"No arrangements. Arrangements are not."

The entire regiment was huddled at the ford now, dim brown lumps in the cold mist. Chen's voice carried clear above the rush of the river. "Make rafts!"

Nobody did anything. Nobody wanted to take the responsibility. Major Hu turned away, pretending to study the slopes.

Sweeney slid off his mule. "What's this jerk want?"

"He has no rafts and he wants some made."

Sweeney got back on his mule. He hunkered low and warmed himself, a good soldier who rested when he could.

Ordinarily, in such a crisis, the men would be told to take off their packs, stack arms and put up their feet to relieve circulation. But these men had no packs, only thin blanket rolls covered with oilskin groundsheets. A few had arms. As for their feet, rope sandals do little to constrict circulation. So they squatted as they had stopped, saying nothing and waiting to cross. It would have been a beautiful, ideal ambush. I glanced up at the opposite bank and wondered if anyone was there.

Chen blew out his cheeks and strutted in a circle. He was furious. He snapped his fingers at Major Hu and demanded to know what was being done about the rafts. The major didn't seem any more interested than he had before. He pointed to the bank.

"There is no raft material. We must swim."

Chen bleated. He shook his arm at the river. "Perhaps you will swim first with a rope?"

Major Hu turned away again, still not interested.

Chen's color was rising. He seemed to be the man he had been before disappointment and disease and seediness entered him like devils and shattered his soul. He seemed to be bigger. He looked sharp and decisive. He once had been very good-looking and now, through the pallor and sagging skin, those good looks stood out and took hold. He fixed his eyes on Major Hu and spoke in clipped, insult-to-intelligence phrases: "Forage for raft wood. Make rafts, three to a company. Send across first a patrol. Order others to follow. Re-form in marching order on the opposite bank." He stalked off to his baggage cart where Wangar, his Number One, squatted on the tenting. "I want to pull smoke." Wangar dutifully produced papers and bag. Chen rolled himself a brown cigarette and lit it.

Captain Ma, of the weapons company, had become enamored of a nurse. She was a Mongol type, flatfaced and widelipped, with hair pulled tight to her neck. She was very strong, stronger than Ma

Company Commander; she was seldom idle, believing that a nurse should nurse, and she had little time for Ma. So when Major Hu called for foraging details, she volunteered. The major waved her away. Ma spoke sharply to her.

She rolled her head, cracked her palms together and said this was very ridiculous, this wasting time at the river, and everyone must do something to get across. Ma frowned. "This is not a woman's war."

The nurse laughed, a high hacking laugh that echoed upward in the gorge. She wheeled and seized another nurse, a small petal from Kwangsi, and they started back up the bank.

Three of the others hopped after them; then some soldiers joined in, grinning and pushing, and suddenly the major and the captain were left alone on their little patch of sand. They looked slightly embarrassed; the major's fish-solemn exterior was flushed. And well might they be embarrassed for this was just a jot of the evidence that piled up daily in living refutation of Ma's remark that it was not a woman's war.

It *was* a woman's war in China for it is a woman's life there—not a man's. It is the natural leadership of Chinese women which shapes the routine of existence into something coherent and whole. The Chinese female is a born leader, a natural doer, and I suspect that the inherent timing of feminine guile kept alert through the centuries is the only thing responsible for her apparent submissiveness. On the surface, the man rules—but only on the surface. He may have several wives or concubines and tell them what to do and when, but it is the woman who will invariably take the lead in a crisis of any sort and who will suffer longer in abject silence than will the man. The man will sit for hours and tell you how rotten everything is while the woman will toss her head, brush away sweat and pick up the load.

AMONG ethnologists, certain nations are known to be "male" and others "female." Thus for obvious reasons, Germany is a male nation and France a female nation. There are disputes, of course, and all decisions do not agree—do not agree, that is, except on China, where all agree; it is female. It is a female nation because the women lead it. Whether balancing tea in Chungking or harvesting rice in Yunnan or living in a bomb ruin with four babies to feed, it is woman's work that does it.

And it is a female nation because without benefit of twisted hormones, the men are like the women and the women are like the men—or like what they should be. The Chinese male, in most cases, is by instinct delicate to the verge of effeminacy. He thinks more of his body than he does of his mind, and physical contact is abhorrent to him. To touch a Chinese, even to pat his back a la western camaraderie, is to offend him. He will argue all day and act like a shrew, but seldom will he fight. He will often feign sickness to avoid an unpleasant task, and if he considers himself a scholar—as so many do—he will protect his body from the harshness of life with any means at his disposal. He is reminiscent in many ways of the delusion-blinded Latin who during a rainstorm will lift his trousers, fold his umbrella and pick his way across a muddy spot lest he become contaminated. The Chinese, if he carries a handkerchief, will hold it across his face when the slightest dust arises around him, which as a gesture may be practical, but as a preventive is a failure. He is always dusty.

Before I went to China, I was told on good authority that one Chinese woman equals ten Chinese men. Since returning, I no longer believe that. It should be one Chinese woman to twenty Chinese men.

The nurses and soldiers who scrambled up the bank and left Major Hu and Captain Ma standing on the sand came down again in less than an hour. They carried racks of limbs tied with bark, and it was obvious that Ma's Mongolian love was the boss.

She directed the placing of the limbs and didn't stop quacking until the arrangement suited her. Everyone else stood by and gaped.

When Captain Ma, in order to save face, stepped forward with a suggestion, she chased him off by yapping, "Ma ma ma," using a set of inflections which made it: "Mother curses the horse." Everyone giggled a shrill giggle, and the captain retreated into the near mists.

Chen finished his brown cigarette and

sauntered over from the baggage cart. "Where is Major Hu?"

Nobody knew.

"But he was ordered to make the rafts!" He glanced at the Mongol. "Who is this nurse?"

The nurse looked levelly at Chen and Chen stared back. Then leadership won and Chen dropped his eyes. He turned, without looking up, and frowned at the rafts. "Those are not large enough."

The nurse dove among the soldiers like a hen among chicks and cackled quick orders. Fingers flew and the rafts took shape and substance. Chen walked away.

Major Hu returned from his sulk and posed the problem of getting the completed rafts across the current. It was swift, perhaps ten knots, and rope was scarce. We could cut poles and try to pry our way over, but one slip of a pole and the raft would go spinning toward the sea. Further east, the Japs were on the river and a loose raft might cause them to make some deductions. Or we could send a man across with a rope, anchor it on the opposite bank and use it as a guide-line for all the rafts. That's what Chen decided to do. He asked Major Hu for a strong swimmer.

The major caught a company commander's eye and told him to procure a strong swimmer. Wangar, hearing this from his perch on Chen's cart, slid down and said he thought he could make it. "I was born here near the Long Death, my mother told me."

Chen frowned. "You are a good Number One. It makes a risk, this current."

"It will carry me. I can walk back on the opposite bank. Give me the rope."

"You for one year have been with me."

"Then let me try."

They wrapped the rope around him and tied it to his shorts. He took off his sandals, placed them on the cart and stepped across the sand to the river. The Mongol nurse shook her head. "He will not finish."

"Will not finish?"

She shook her head again. "He has no lungs. Look at his lungs."

He was thin-chested, all right. Thin-chested and sag-shouldered. A deep pit showed his breastbone and ribs plainly. He crouched back, straightened his arms and plunged into the current. A leg wheeled up and over; his arms beat hard as he spun from sight and was gone in the mists. The Mongol spat and sat down. "He will not finish."

Chen said, "We will pull him back now." He took the anchored end, tied to a raft, and yanked it. It was trembling. "You *dungsi! Thing!*" he barked at a soldier. "Pull!"

Together they pulled, and the nurse watched balefully. Then the rope came loose and Chen and the soldier hauled hand over hand. A ruffle of white water showed in the current and they whipped the end ashore. Fastened to it was a faded pair of limp shorts. They were Wangar's.

Chen untied them and threw them on the cart with the sandals. "He might be across. Now he might be across."

"He did not finish." The nurse looked sad. "He was born in the Long Death, his mother said. He died in it, too. I know."

"He may come back. We will find him on the other side."

"No, he died."

Chen lighted another brown cigarette and leaned against the cart.

FAT HU and tall Ma stood by helplessly, their mouths open, arms hanging loose. Only the nurse seemed to be thinking. She worked her lips; her eyes were shining. Finally she got up and asked for the rope.

Chen said, "No."

"I want that rope. Now I will try. I have lungs—look!" She threw out her slab breasts. "The rope will be tight on me."

"No."

She picked up the rope, looped it around her waist and made a knot. "Tie the other end, *dungsi*. Tie it to the raft."

A soldier obeyed.

Then she walked into the river like some misshapen goddess on sacrifice bent. The current spewed against her and bubbled across her broad face. She lunged from one foot and went down the gorge with the current, head turning and turning.

Chen snapped his cigarette into the river and walked away. He turned suddenly and came back to the raft and stared at the rope, stared horribly. It was still tight.

"Thing! Put your hand on that rope. If it becomes loose, pull on it."

Ma and Hu, their mouths closed now, watched the rope like men eyeing a cobra. It stayed tight, perking only occasionally; once it went slack, then straightened. Ma shifted his weight and let out his breath.

Then the rope went loose gradually. It was still laying into the current, but apparently it didn't have much weight on the other end. As he watched, it moved from downstream to midstream. Soon it was laying almost cross-stream, a trembling thing that ended somewhere in the mists. It went tight, fell loose, then tightened again. A shout sounded from the opposite bank. She had made it.

We couldn't see her because the mists lay low, but she called again and we shouted back. Everyone felt pretty good. It was our first victory of the campaign even though it hadn't been fought against the Japs.

The rope was taken from the raft and anchored to shale. Short pieces were looped around it and so to the rafts, making it possible to work them across by hand without having them break loose and follow poor Wangar down the gorge. We had eighteen rafts, not half enough, but by nightfall the regiment would be on the opposite shore. And that was the point.

Criticism, one of mankind's main faults, is also one of its principal preoccupations. It all adds up to ego, which—properly controlled—is one of the finest things to be found in the field. Hence, in discussing the Chinese Army, I use the critical standards of the American Army, which are high.

Doubtless, three different commanders will react in three different ways to one situation, but their overall tactics will be essentially the same. You and I and Jones will be confronted with a mountain; we will agree to by-pass it in favor of other terrain, but will disagree as to the method of by-passing. But the point remains: we by-passed it, selecting open ground instead of a vertical cul-de-sac.

Chen did not, and that's why he should be racked and with reason. Standing on the north bank of the gorge that rainy evening, he decided to take the regiment straight up the face to the top and bivouac. He had an alternative. He could have gone east down the bank to low ground which the map said was four miles away. But he had a fear of depressions and wanted to get high up where he could see. In his favor, high ground is one of the most desirable possessions of a field commander. It commands a view, a field of fire, and it's easier to hold. In the main, defenders have lower casualty rates than attackers, all things being equal. But love of high ground holds only when the enemy is near and there is expectancy of attack, or when the terrain must be defended.

None of these things held here.

The Japanese were far to the north and east. There was no possibility of their attacking us, and this terrain was to be marched across, not defended.

Nevertheless, Chen spurned a suggestion to stay in the gorge, and ordered the 1st Battalion's patrols forward up the rocks. They moved slowly, gingerly. They were afraid. It was cold and damp and the rain had soaked the land and made everything slippery. The patrols hoisted themselves from sight, and the battalion started after them.

Major Hu, personally distasteful but professionally able, offered to take the mules, carts and nurses, together with the heavy weapons, down the bank to the low ground. "We can join on top in two hours," he proposed.

Chen wouldn't hear of it. "We will not divide the command, Hu Adjutant." He folded his arms and leaned back on one foot like Napoleon.

Then a shriek sounded in the night and something bumped once and crashed into the river. A little round field cap fluttered down and folded into the sand.

"Keep moving!" Chen snapped. "Don't look!"

Our second casualty, that. Two up for the Long Death. The 1st Battalion moved slowly upward, freezing to the slopes, edging forward, freezing again. Major Hu, watching some soldiers beach the last of the rafts, slapped his thighs and turned to Chen. "That rope, Chen Regimental Commander. We can use that again."

"For the nurses?"

"For the weapons. We will haul the weapons up with that rope."

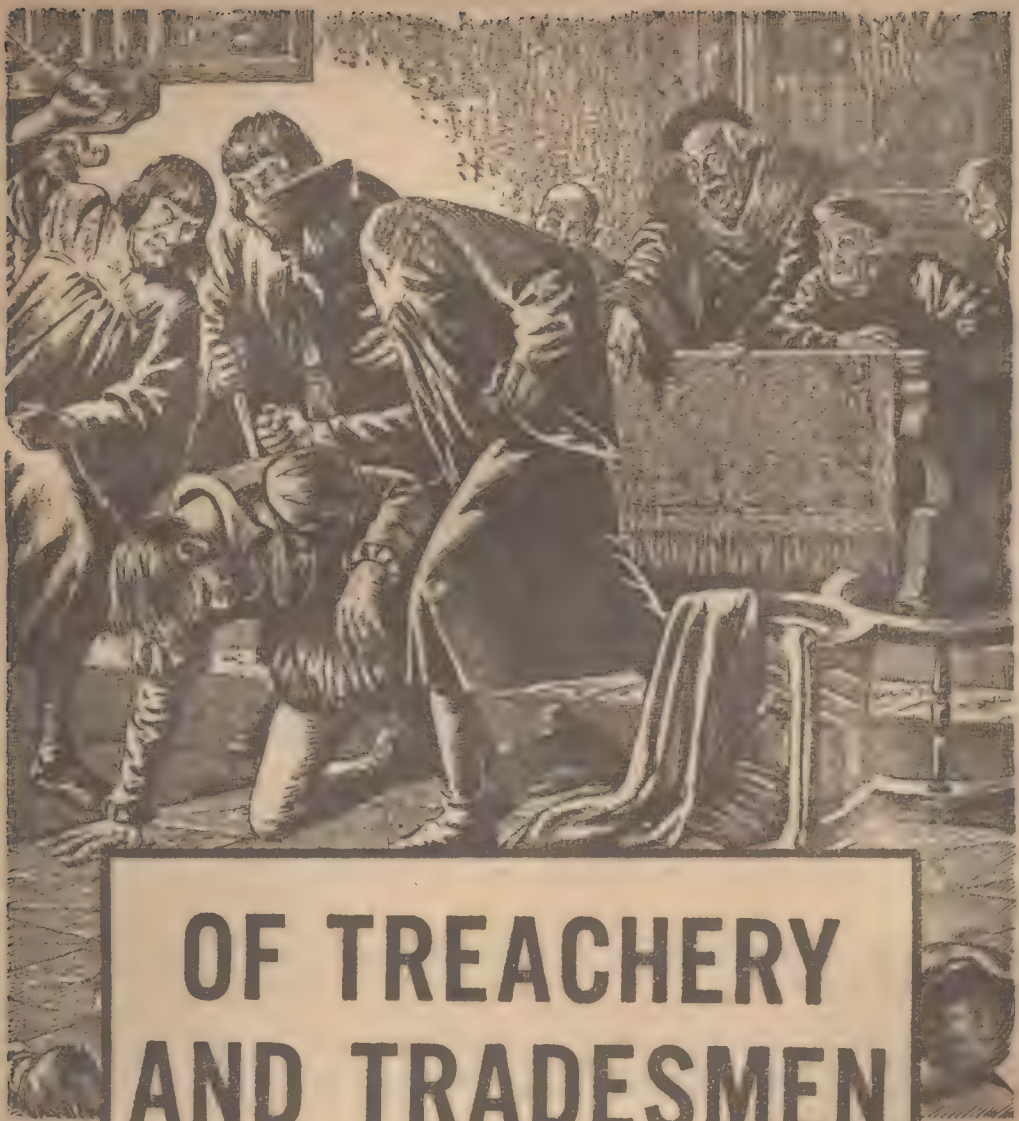
(Continued on page 145)

"Keep him on the red carpet!" screams the old podesta. *"Get no blood on our new floor!"*

A Caradosso Story

By F. R. BUCKLEY

ILLUSTRATED BY L. STERNE STEVENS



OF TREACHERY AND TRADESMEN

TO His Serene Highness Pietro IV; of Rometia Duke, Count of Cartresi, Count of Sola, Lord of Rimaldo and Bonelli, Tyrant of Casatico and so following; from Luigi Caradosso, sometime Captain of the Guard, these;

Sire:

With the utmost consternation I have heard that Your Lordship intends (if rumour belies him not) to become patron or syndic or some such of the Wool-Carders' Guild of Montemurlo; I presume for the purpose of adding to Your Serenity's revenues. I am aware, of course, that it is not Your Grace's intention to comb fleeces, or whatever it is these greasy rascals do, but rather to lend the prestige of Your Eminence's name to these rogues in their quarrel with the sheep-shavers of Pontevecchio; I know also that nowadays

it is not unknown for nobles to take part in the scurrying and scratching of the common people.

Nevertheless, God is against such goings on, and so am I myself. Most evidently the true contact of a noble is with soldiers, not with burghers; he is to use his troops to protect the merchants while they make money in peace and tranquility, and then to take away from them his just three-quarters of their gains. Even so a wise farmer protects his hives while the insects contained therein make honey; even so at the proper time he relieves them of all but their bare needs. But no yokel in his right mind has ever yet tried himself to become a bee.

Possibly—though I pray Heaven it may not be so—Your Highness hath embarked on this emprise with the idea that merchants, dealing in papers and hides and wool and sealing-wax and similar blunt instruments, and smelling no smoke except that from their tallow candles, are poor honest boobies with no idea beyond buying a thing for one price and selling it for another—an idea I myself held until the autumn of the year 1525. What happened in that September, to uproot my faith in the merchandising portion of humanity, and to cause me, almost sixty years later, to write Your Lordship this letter, I will now in a few words relate.

HAVING left the convent in which I had been raised, and not yet having entered the service of Your Highness' grandfather (whom God receive) I was at that time second lieutenant in the troop of freelances commanded by Luca Pitti. For various reasons I had joined this band as a man-at-arms; had within three months (outside business was very slack) fought and killed my corporal and sergeant and my predecessor in the lieutenancy and, despite a certain difficulty in the path of further promotion, was fairly happy with my one stripe of fur when, as I shall show, we were entrusted with the siege of Valenza. The block to promotion was the fact that the first lieutenant was a son of Luca Pitti; who, desiring for some reason to preserve this stripling alive, had made a rule that whoso wished to replace him should fight the lieutenant and Pitti himself, both at one time. This was absolutely against the custom of the Free Bands, and naturally irksome to me, a young man trying to make his way in the world; because while I could have managed either father or son separately, the two together would at that time have been too much for me. Or so I thought. As Your Grace knows, I have always been modest of my own abilities and averse from unnecessary violence. And while my fights with the corporal, sergeant and second lieutenant had been decent affairs, over within ten minutes each, I had the idea that fighting blood-relations who would certes have planned some combined attack, might easily degenerate into a vulgar brawl.

So I commanded the light cavalry on the left of the line, as was the custom for second lieutenants in those days, and patiently abode my time. It was a bad season for *condottieri* in any case, the Pope and the Emperor being for the moment at peace and most nobles—also for the moment—satisfied with their gains or losses in the wars of the last two years.

Which is how we came to be mixed up in the quarrels of those merchants at Molfetta.

Like Your Highness, Luca Pitti had a great contempt for all such. A week after they had written requesting his aid, he walked into their council chamber with his son and me behind him, ignored the chair of state they had set for him, told them his price for the work they had to offer and informed them they could take it or leave it.

I had some sympathy with his attitude; because in effect, Your Lordship, these—like the burghers with whom Your Highness thinks to associate himself—were a poor-looking lot of fellows; in their fifties and sixties for the most part, pale in the face and without a good beard among the seven of them; swaddled moreover in robes which might have let their hands out for pen-work, but for nothing dangerous.

"But, Captain—" says the chief of them, peering at us through his spectacles.

Luca Pitti raised his hand.

"*Signori,*" says he in a weary manner, "I beg you not to empest me with explanations of the military situation or arguments as to how much I shall be paid for dealing with it. I asked six questions of the messenger who brought your letter;

I have looked at the city of Valenza, which you wish me to take for you; I have considered the situation and I have told you my price. Now let us have a simple yes or no, so that I may spend the rest of the day either sending a declaration of war to the said Valenza, or asking that city if it would care to hire me to fight *you*."

"Fight *us*?" squeaks this *podesta*, while all the others turned pale. "But Captain, 'tis we who—"

"Very like, very like," says Luca. He had been chewing the stalk of a flower—a habit of his—so far into the conversation; he now spat it out on the floor. "But you must remember, *signori*, that I am not a citizen of this place or of Valenza either. I am a soldier, selling battle as you fellows sell cloth; if there is a market and one won't buy my wares, another will. I have my merchandise and must get the best price for it I can. The only difference between us is that I can cut throats and burn houses, whereas you—" and he looked slowly from the left to the right of them—"cannot."

They fumbled their scraggy necks at that.

"Then again," says Luca carelessly, "once my men get into a town—some of you may have young wives—But choose for yourselves."

At this, it seemed to me, their pallor changed to a greenish hue.

"'Tis such a price," says one oldster, "that we shall have to raise a special tax."

Luca shrugged his shoulders.

"That's your affair, my masters. My only concern is that I can have either Valenza or this place a hell of blood, screams and ashes within three weeks, and if it's to depend on which of you can raise a tax, why doubtless that's the way Heaven chooses to manifest its will."

SO THEY agreed; and the next day we sent a formal defiance (on their behalf) to Valenza, inviting them to close their gates, man their walls and otherwise assist us to earn our money. We could of course have surprised them and had the city on its knees with one charge down the main street and perhaps an afternoon of hangings; but in the first place it would not have been wise to do this before we had been paid; and then again, others beside their respective councils of elders were interested in those two towns.

While Molfetta eyed Valenza and Valenza scowled back at Molfetta, in fact, the Duke of Milan, the Republic of Venice and the Signoria of Florence were eyeing the two towns together as possible additions to their domains. As I have said, the great powers, nobles and republics alike, were at the moment a little exhausted; but though they had been bled pretty white of men and money, their greeds remained unimpaired and it was necessary to tread delicately among their envies.

Wherefore we took our time about investing Valenza, to see if Milan, Venice or Florence would raise objections; and it was not until a week had passed and no messengers had come (except from our employers, who with great groanings paid us the first half of the price agreed on) did we cut up a couple of Valenzan foraging parties and rig an engine to throw rocks and dead horses into the town. We had four guns, but Luca would not use them; powder being too dear, he said, to be burned in the service of the unappreciative. A noble would, of course, have demanded artillery for his money; but how should mere paper-spoilers know anything of such matters?

Ah me!

I am not going to describe the siege, Your Highness, because it was a very dull affair and my purpose is not to weary, but to warn, Your Lordship's Eminence. We closed the town up tight as a drum; I led a couple of escalading parties over the walls by night; set fire to the town in various places and blew up their magazine—nothing out of the ordinary. Oh, except that once I got separated from my men and made the acquaintance of a girl who thought I was one of the Molfetta city guard. That was an amusing couple of hours—but the couple of weeks that succeeded were, as I have said, dull beyond belief.

Your Grace may judge how dull when I say that it came as a holiday to me when Luca Pitti said he was going to Molfetta the next day and that I was to accompany him.

"They'll be wanting to haggle about the price again," says he, yawning and waving the letter he had received from the

syndics, "or perhaps they think themselves entitled to reports on the progress of their war—like nobles, ha ha! We'll go and be rude to them, Luigi. Alfredo can do what's necessary here."

Alfredo was his son; and to do nothing —which was what we were doing against Valenza at the moment—was within his powers.

"We'd better wear our fighting clothes," says Luca, yawning again. "Give 'em the idea that we're diligent in their business. Borrow an old breastplate and leave thy beard uncombed."

"What about an escort?" I asked.

"Bad enough to tire two horses for such pettifoggers," says he. "Besides—are not all our men valiantly engaged storming Valenza?"

So, the next day, we trotted into Molfetta, the two of us alone. Ah, ha!

Let Your Highness pay particular attention to what followed.

THE old men of the Council were there, in the chamber we had visited before; one had the impression that they had not moved since last we'd seen them; but on the floor now, as though to receive us with honor, was a wide red carpet which had not been there at the earlier time; and on each side of it stood a merchants' idea of a guard of honor—eight clerks, they looked like, divided into two files of four; dressed in black, of course without armor or weapons and standing to attention like so many sacks of meal.

While the syndics waited at their table, Luca, who had a pretty sense of humor, pretended to inspect these scriveners, passing before and behind them and seeming to examine their fustian as though they had in fact been soldiers in ceremonial dress. Entering into the spirit of the thing, I walked behind him, almost suffocating with mirth; and, to carry out the joke in detail, rated one of the fellows soundly for coming on parade with a dirty pen. This broke down Luca's gravity as well as my own, and we were both roaring with laughter as Luca seated himself in the chair before the syndics' table and I took my place behind him.

Neither the syndics nor the clerks cracked so much as a smile.

"Well, well, my masters," says Luca when he had had his laugh out. "And what's the news with you? Dived into your wives' stockings for the rest of the money, have you?"

The old *podesta* in the middle cleared his throat and said, still without smiling, no, the matter in hand was not financial.

"Well, it had better become so, and soon," says Luca.

"Yes, but in the meantime," says the *podesta*, fumbling in his robes and producing a paper, "we have here a document, Captain, which we have thought it right to bring to your attention. You are aware that for some years past both this city and Valenza, with which we are now so regrettably at war, have had much to do to preserve our liberties against the Duke of Milan, the Venetians and the Florentines. This present war, indeed—"

"Yes, yes," says Luca impatiently; because (though I have spared Your Grace the details) the syndics had made it clear at our former meeting that their object in attacking Valenza was to force that town into a union strong enough to defy the great powers. It was a foolish notion, and their real object was of course to seize Valenza's trade; but nevertheless there had been talk, until we were sick of it, of liberty, freedom, ancient rights and suchlike. There always is.

"Since then Your Honor so well remembers our desire to be free from outside lordship," says the *podesta* as if he had it all by heart, "you will undoubtedly be surprised to learn that Your Honor's lieutenant—who I believe is also his son—?"

"What's all this?" says Luca.

The *podesta* unfolded the paper.

"—that the said lieutenant Alfredo," says he, "hath sent a letter to the Duke of Milan, offering for the sum of twenty thousand crowns to give him lordship of Valenza after it shall have been captured at our expense; and then to lead your forces, Captain, against *this* city; and to turn Molfetta also over to His Grace."

"*What?*" gasps Luca.

"This letter. It came—ah—into our hands before reaching the Duke," says the *podesta*. "Furthermore Your Honor's son guarantees the Duke against any interference with this plan by Your Honor; on the ground that Your Honor will, immediately on receipt of the Duke's acceptance—ah—cease to live."

Luca bolted out of his chair, reached across the table, snatched the letter from the *podesta's* hands and scanned it, his face turning gradually from rage-pale to red, and from red to purple. At last, speechless beyond a sort of bark of fury, he stuffed the letter under his belt and turned, as I judged his intention, to ride back to camp and speak severely to Messer Alfredo.

"One moment, Captain," says the *podesta,* however, and as Luca turned to glare at him, produced from his robes another paper.

"Lest you should be too hasty with the young man," says the old goat, unfolding this missive, "I feel I must tell you that there hath also come into our hands—intercepted by a patrol of our citizens, keeping open Your Honor's lines of communication—a letter from Your Honor himself to the Republic of Venice; offering to sell it the cities of Valenza and Molfetta for thirty thousand sequins, and for the same sum to hang Luigi Caradosso here present, against whom the Republic hath some accusations. *Would Your Honor care to verify the signature?*"

WHAT Luca might have answered will never be known; because those last words were a signal at which four of the clerks who had received us flung themselves upon him, while the other four attached themselves respectively to my own arms and legs; one of them additionally whipping out my sword from its loops and throwing it across the council chamber.

Luca they did not disarm; instead, producing daggers from their sad raiment, they stabbed him to death; finally pulling his head backward by the hair and cutting his throat from ear to ear.

"Keep him on the red carpet!" screams the old *podesta.* "Get no blood on our new floor!"

Ah, Sire, the lack of human feeling! There was no struggle left, of course, in poor Luca by this time. The four who had dealt with him now let him fall, rolled him up in the carpet and carried him out of the chamber.

"And now, Luigi Caradosso—" says the *podesta;* at which words, Sire, I deemed it time to act.

I was young then and, despite my apprenticeship to Luca, lamentably inexperienced; but it had always seemed to me that a soldier should hold to the tools of his trade. Naturally among these one thinks first of all of the sword; but there are occasions in the life of a young man—climbing up to a window, for instance, or even sleeping alone—when a sword on the person is an inconvenience. I had therefore, ever since leaving the monastery, carried in a sheath up my left sleeve a dagger just as long as the distance from my wrist to my elbow; a beautiful little thing it was, with one of the nicest hilts I ever cuddled.

Well, these two rogues who had attached themselves to my arms had twisted these members behind my back; causing me some discomfort but bringing my right hand pleasantly near my left sleeve. From which, without undue delay or loud announcement of the action, I naturally drew forth the aforesaid little knife. Convulsing myself so as to fall on my back and dragging down those false clerks with me, I got my right arm free for an instant and in that instant drove the blade fairly deep into the neck of one of the men—I forget which, and at this distance it matters not; they had no time to fumble for their own weapons and I slaughtered the four of them like sheep.

But, just as I was rising, there returned to the chamber those bloody four who had been disposing of the corpse of poor Luca; and at once there began, Your Grace, another and less pleasant story.

The whole eight of those clerks were (as I learned later) in fact butchers by trade; and so, having slain Luca, they had had no prejudice against sticking their daggers, all dirty, in the belts of their black suits. Whence, naturally, they had no difficulty in extracting them as they advanced upon me, baying like wolves.

But for the mercy that their experience theretofore had been mostly with sheep and cattle, who are usually unarmed—and, of course, with poor Luca, who had had no chance to defend himself—I should not now be writing these lines of advice to Your Serenity. As it was, I had a worrying time with yon *quartetto* except for the first couple of minutes.

The proper method of fighting with a knife is to hold the wrist bent and the

blade, edge out, along the forearm; and since, having been well brought up, I was holding my weapon thus, the first two fellows thought I had dropped my dagger or something—anyhow, they fell on me as they might have on a pig and by wiping the throat of one of them with my advancing arm and sticking the throat of the other as I brought the arm back again, I was able to deal with them both very expeditiously.

The third to attack me was lucky; he fell before a kick I administered to him and was alive and happy (except for the fact that he had no children) when I passed through the town full fifty years later. He spoke with admiration of my dealing with the fourth (or eighth, depending on how one counts) of that band of ruffians to which he had belonged so long ago.

This fourth person, taking advantage of the experience of the others, was wary of me; and since he retreated, weaving to and fro, mouthing oaths and threats and holding his knife pretty much in the proper way, I was for some minutes wary.

But soon it appeared that he was a mere mime, tossing my own remarks back at me and imitating my movements without knowledge of the wherefore; so I tired of his company after very few minutes. I twice offered him my left shoulder to cut at, meaning when he tried it to rip him up the middle Naples-style; I dropped my dagger in fact, sure that he would rush forward and let me behind him with my fingers, but there was no knowledge or enterprise in him at all—and moreover I was disgusted with the screams of the old councilmen who thought the booby had me at his mercy.

So I danced in and out at him a few times, hoping the syndics might think he had fought well and so give his family a few ducats; and then I shepherded him over to where my sword lay and picked it up and cut his head off. Never in my life have I seen a man's face look so astonished two feet above his own shoulders.

WELL, of course, Your Grace, having my sword I was my own man again; and with it and the dagger had no difficulty in making my way down the stairs—a lot of city guard and riff-raff had been attracted by the shouting and the screams of the man I had kicked, and the sight of the other man's head flying out of window; I dealt with these sight-seers as gently as possible, took my horse and poor Luca's and, without further politenesses, left the town.

What happened to me thereafter is no concern of the present narrative, which is solely designed to exhibit to Your Grace the dangers of consorting with merchants.

Who would have imagined that while we were almost risking our lives in their war—for which they had not yet paid us in full—those Molfettan rascals would have gone about to intercept letters from poor Luca and his son to persons as eminent as the Duke of Milan and the Doge of Venice?

And even that was not the full extent of their unscrupulousness; because, having murdered Luca, that rogue of a *podesta* would have had me slain too, had I not wakened just in time from my dream of honesty among traders.

For at the moment he said, "And now, Luigi Caradosso—"—as I have told above—he was pulling from his bosom a document I recognized as a letter of my own, lately written to the Signoria of Florence. I had been in the service of this Signoria some eighteen months; it was at their orders I had joined poor Luca's troop; and in this letter I had offered to fight Luca and his son together, kill them, take command of the band and capture Valenza and Molfetta for Florence; provided that in case of accident the Signoria would pension my widows, who at that time would have numbered four.

So that Your Grace sees that not on two occasions only, but on three, those pious-seeming merchants had stopped messengers and seized confidential letters not to their address—missives dealing with the most sacred family matters.

Than which I need say no more; being sure that Your Grace will see the unwisdom of lending his countenance to a race of beings so insensible not only to Your Highnesses' exalted ideas of honor
But also to the plain decencies
Practised during a long life

By Your Eminence's honest straightforward servant

L. Caradosso.
Captain.

THE CAMP-FIRE

Where Readers, Writers and Adventurers Meet

CONCERNING his story which ends on the opposite page, F. R. Buckley air-mails from Switzerland the following brief paragraphs of commentary—

I shall never forget the shock I got when, a few years ago, someone at *Camp-Fire*—I think it was actually the editor himself—alluded to Captain Caradosso as a ruffian. Having been so closely associated with the old gentleman* for twenty-odd years, (Caradosso first drew his sword in these pages back in December 1927) I suppose I have accepted his *cinquecento* morality and have come to take the same view of his exploits as he does himself. For of course, as any reader of Benvenuto Cellini will agree (and I hope I have sent a few ADVENTURE readers to that immortal autobiography) the idea that a man who in those days murdered his enemy or acted as the soldiers do in this story was doing anything *wrong*, would have been considered completely absurd. He was exercising his *virtu*, he was exhibiting his *terribilta;* both admirable qualities without which no man could then expect to get anywhere worth while. There have been, one must realize, different systems of morality in vogue in the world at different times; some worse than those which prevail (to some extent) today; and some a good deal better.

Without prejudice, I've chosen for my province a period generally considered to be much more violent and treacherous than the present; and as principal character a typical soldier of that time. What will be said of Luigi after this section of his memoirs I do not know; but whatever it is I can imagine him saying in retort that he has plenty of successors in the 20th century—only in higher places and a little more lavishly whitewashed.

Events startlingly similar to those related in "Of Treachery and Tradesmen" actually took place in Perugia in the 14th century. Anyone who thinks he knows of any more modern parallels had perhaps better say nothing about them.

There are ruffians and ruffians—and if we needs must be harried by such ilk (as Buckley insists we must, in this 20th century even as in the 14th) —Caradosso is our man. But we have yet to find his like today. Pretty pale ruffianism now, Mr. B.—compared to Luigi's—or maybe we haven't been fraternizing with the right kind of scoundrels!

AND Georges Surdez sends along the following notation to accompany the first instalment of his new serial which opens this issue on page 6—

"Restricted!" grew naturally. A few months ago I received a batch of newspapers from France—sheets published by the Resistance groups—during and following the Occupation. Most of them were metropolitan, from the Paris region—but there were a lot from the

* Captain Caradosso; not the editor.

provinces. Of course I picked out those from places I knew well for complete perusal and found some rather curious items, and some touching ones—*Today, at 15 o'clock, solemn funeral of eight patriots executed by the Germans. Meeting at Town Hall.* And: *The authorities claim that they lack cars and gasoline for ambulances to take returning and sick prisoners from train to hospital when we see many private cars parked outside of night clubs.* And one paper, from a rather small town in the east, gave a few words of advice to the police: *If the police were as interested in the whereabouts of certain parties as they claimed, why did not the police seek them where they had gone for their health*—and it mentioned a place I knew about, long known as "a most salubrious spot."

With that to start with, I started digging. I wrote friends and saw friends—who knew a thing or two about the OSS, the Resistance, the black market in cattle and dairy produce, etc. But I hereby state that any resemblance between the Sana in the story and the establishment near to the village of C . . . . . ., where I lived a couple of years, is accidental, coincidental. That was a very refined rest-home for wealthy people, and I am quite sure that the burly guys in green uniforms who carried guns, hovered in the vicinity to keep us kids from climbing trees and looking over the wall at the swell tea-parties on the lawns, and not at all to keep anyone inside.

A Russian whom I knew as a private of the Foreign Legion told me many stories about de luxe booby-hatches, years ago. He had lived in three or four of them, between 1909 and 1914, as his family thought him unbalanced because he could not live on twenty-five hundred bucks per month. In 1914, he had been released to become an officer of cavalry—I draw no conclusions from that, either about cavalry in general or the Russian cavalry (of 1914) in particular. In his opinion, the best Sanas of that kind were in Switzerland. The French ones were rather slack and the help often grew coarsely humorous and greedy. A French gentleman I met who had been in for a while to cure a mania for gambling, confirmed this.

GEORGE C. APPELL'S "The Long Death" on page 120 is a chapter from his forthcoming book "Gau Shan"—an account of his experiences while serving with the Chinese Army. Mr. Appell explains—

During the closing years of the war the United States, in anticipation of Chinese-American vs. Japanese land combat in China, sent liaison teams, technicians and instructors to the Orient to prepare the way for co-ordinated effort in the field. There were complete American units, such as the 124th Cavalry and 375th Infantry, and there were Navy and Marine teams and weather monitors. But perhaps those who saw more of the Chinese and came to know them best were the men on liaison duty. Some had it for a year or more, others for only months. And it was a practise of still others to "drop in" for a week or two, on a Chinese regiment, then leave. The majority, however, trudged through the valleys and over the mountains for weary months, and at the end of the tour were either complete admirers of the Chinese—"slopey-lovers"—or Chinese-haters. It all depended upon how far the individual was willing to go in an attempt to understand them and to appreciate the terrific drubbing they'd taken for eight years.

During my service with the Chinese Training Command, when the American goal was to train and equip thirty-six key Chinese divisions, a small army was sent out to probe the huge Japanese ring which extended in a curve from Mongolia to Burma to the Netherlands Indies. One of the regimental commanders was Chen, and his adjutant was Hu; and Sweeney was there, too—Sweeney the radio sergeant. And there were Chinese nurses in transport, nurses who had little equipment except character, and who stood like pikes when their men wavered. At one point on the march, it was necessary to cross a river. . . .

B. L. McGANN, who gives us "The Head of the Bearded One" on page 82 this month, never spent a day north of the Arctic Circle in his life and we don't think it matters an iota! (We have contributors who have practically grown up on an ice pack and we'll give you the frigid tip-off when they contribute. But McGann is something else again.)

Witness—

I was born in Kentucky and spent my early boyhood on the Gila when Arizona was still a territory, listening to tales of the Apaches from the bearded lips of gaunt-faced men who knew them when. Later some of those men reappeared on earth to speak to me from the pages of Stewart Edward White's "Arizona Nights."

Although I now live in Ojai Valley, Ventura County, California, I still go down into that country on the thinnest pretext. For Arizona is more than a mere political subdivision: it's a fever which forevermore burns in the blood of those who have once felt and breathed and listened to the desert wind keening through the suhuaras, mouthed alkalai dust and known the bitter-sweet loneliness of empty desert and empty sky.

I like to poke around the ruins of the old Butterfield Stage depot at Oatman Flat. (They killed the mother and father and kidnapped the girl and scalped the boy and threw him down a dry well. Years later I saw him in Los Angeles, and when he took off his hat and bowed to my mother he was satisfying as bald as an orange.) And I like to gaze at the mountain which was named for my father. It isn't much of a mountain, so it wasn't given much of a name. It's called

"McGann's Bump" and it's just out of Sentinel.

One black rain-lashed night the dam which my father had just completed across the Gila burst with a sundering roar; we moved out to Los Angeles and from there, in due time, I entered Stanford University to study torts and contracts. And I did study torts and contracts, (I swear I studied torts and contracts!) But what's a mere oath to a law professor, especially when the defendant was obviously having fun editing the college yearbook and a literary magazine so aptly named as (this was during Prohibition) *The Stanford Lit?* And planning a voyage down the Snake River on a raft? And a prospecting trip in Alaska? And the establishment of a vanilla-bean plantation (to be called Yakahoola, Ltd.) on a hitherto—and as yet—undiscovered South Sea island? (If McGann had been a really faithful reader of *Adventure* down through the years, he couldn't help but know that the place to establish that vanilla-bean plantation was Mexico and not the South Seas. Ed.)

Still, the faculty stood me for four years and after seeing a bit of the world I returned to L. A. and became a public relations counsel. (Four-bit term for press agent.) Sometime later I was engaged to help promote a little one-ship harbor about an hour's drive up the coast from Santa Monica, destined to become USN ABD Port Hueneme, embarkation and supply point for thousands of Seabees, Acorns, Arguses, Casus and Patsus headed for Epic, Ebon, Biff, Host, Duva and a hundred other code-named Pacific islands. As a civilian employee of the Navy, I watched more than 700 freighters and transports clear the submarine net in a little over two years' time. (I might add for the benefit of those ADVENTURE readers who knew the joys of Splinter City and Camp Rousseau that things are pretty dead down that way now, although there is considerable activity with guided missile experiments at Point Mugu.)

Before the war, however, I had bought a couple of newspapers, then sold them and moved back into the mountains to Ojai Valley. I had become interested in doing a definitive biography of Capt. John Ericsson of *Monitor* fame and as this proved to be a more monumental task than I had anticipated (his life spanned nearly the whole of the 19th century), I decided to go at it leisurely and put most of my time on fiction.

I am married and have one daughter who expects to enter Stanford next year to study —torts and contracts. My favorite sport is trout fishing, although in this year of scarce rains I plan to leave my flies at home and take only a bucket of water as a lure. (The angling's been just as dry in the East this year, pal! Ed.)

I wish that I could give you some interesting sidelights on the creation of "The Head" —I wish that I could say that I have been in the Coronation Gulf country, etc., but in all honesty the story had its genesis in Stefansson's "The Friendly Arctic" and Dr. Elisha Kane's "Adrift in the Arctic Icepack."

I took Stefansson's first-hand knowledge of the "blonde Eskimos," their customs and habitat. To this I added bits of information gleaned from a friend who was stationed in Alaska while in the Air Corps and then guessing that the Navy's oil development program near the Colville River would result in publicity for that part of the country (*S.E.P.* had an article on it a while back), I wrote the yarn. I'm sorry I've never sweated through a whole winter on a diet of nothing more substantial than walrus chitlings, but I do want you to know that I did a conscientious job of research, even though I have never burned my gullet with a swig of scalding blood soup.

And do we hold it against him? . . . No!

ROBINSON MacLEAN, whose story "Shipment Seventeen"—on page 48—marks his first appearance at the *Camp-Fire*, gives us a bit of inside dope on that highly-glamorized character, the international spy—and then concludes with a brief dossier of his own "relatively routine" career. Some routine, we say, but judge for yourself—

I've bumped into a number of spies, in the course of kicking around the world, and none of them seemed to act the way other people's spies behave. They acted more like policemen, off-duty. There was a little Japanese, Masao Yamaouchi. He'd tell you he was a spy, and ask you over to have sukiyaki so he could brag about how well he was doing. He'd read you his reports, if you gave him any encouragement. That was, of course, long before Pearl Harbor. There was a stocky Prussian, who'd acquired the improbable name of Haroun al Rashish from the Turkish government, after the last war, for his services in directing machine-gun training. He had a bulletproof Opel coupe, with portholes to shoot through and a magnificent blonde wife. But Masao got bounced back to Japan, because he talked too much, and Haroun got shot, for transmitting on the radio in the back of his buggy, so I guess they couldn't have been very good spies.

The only good spies I ever knew were on our side—British, American, Canadian—so I can't use their names. But they still looked like cops, off duty.

I wrote "Shipment Seventeen" to see how my kind of spy—a nice guy, that could have been a good policeman, with more patience than psychology, would handle the kind of assignment most spies get—cleaning up something that's come apart in somebody else's hands.

It was my contention that the way to find a missing man, in a tough foreign port, would be about the same way you'd find him in Hamtramck, Michigan.

It was my further contention that a hunted man, such as the story concerns, would be most likely to find the best help from women of the worst reputation. The Ethiopians have a saying: "Never buy a mule from an honest

man, or ask alms from a virtuous woman."/ In the spring of 1939 the RCMP staged a clean-up of the mining town of Yellowknife, in the Northwest Territories. Six girls were arrested, and they faced a $500 fine or five-month jail term, each. The miners passed the hat and raised the money. One girl was so grateful at this generosity that she spent her $500 on liquor for a party. I saw her, in jail at Fort Smith. All she had to say was, "It was a wonderful party."

I used Port Said for the setting for "Shipment Seventeen" because it is the logical place, and because I have a weakness for it. If you land from Europe, or Cairo, it's just a cesspool on stilts. But from Arabia, or the northwest coast of Africa, it's Heaven. You take off your sun helmet without dropping dead, and you can buy things, in stores, without sending your Number One boy down to the other end of town to negotiate with somebody that knows somebody that can run up an imitation when he gets his sewing machine fixed. My only complaint with it, as a city, is that they keep chicken coops on top of the apartment buildings, and some of the chickens get out and roost too close to the edge—for pedestrians.

My "personal" docket is relatively routine.

I live on the edge of a canyon at Tujunga, California, with a son, a wife who did something secret about enemy film for OSS during the war, and a succession of small, female, mongrel dogs that people keep leaving in the canyon to get rid of.

The occupations, starting at the 1929 end, include: Surveying the Willowbrook Northwesterly branch of a railway in Saskatchewan; wrapping parcels for a Los Angeles department store; police-reporting for an Edmonton newspaper; writing a radio comedy show in Minneapolis; barking for a fan-dance show at the Chicago World's Fair; spending six years digging into other people's business in every town in every province of Canada, as a reporter for Toronto papers; covering the first Ethiopian war and writing a book about it; directing war documentary films for the Canadian Government; covering the last cruise of the Third Fleet as Admiral Halsey's photo officer; writing educational records for children of tender years and hard-boiled murder shows for radio listeners of callous caliber.

I have two souvenirs, of which I'm fond. One is the gold-mounted sword and shield that Haile Selassie gave me, from his own arm, when I left Addis Ababa. The other is remembering the time I got stuck, aboard a British submarine, in a mudbank off the Atlantic coast, with a Russian cameraman. The crew dogged the hatches, and the cameraman and I were alone in a forward compartment, fifty feet under the water. He looked at me coldly and said, "They should let us out. We're passengers."

CARL J. KUNZ, who gave us "A Pig for Mauna Loa" in the September issue, joins our *Ask Adventure* experts this month to answer queries on Hawaii. We introduced him in this department when his story appeared. Now he adds a few words on becoming a staff-member—

I shall be happy to try to answer questions on T. H. as a member of the *Ask Adventure* staff. My interest in the Islands did not end with my return to the States where I set out building an essential library of Hawaiiana. I have managed to collect some unusual reference volumes. One, published back in 1828, is the first known book on the Islands.

When I was living in the Islands, I had the honor of being acclaimed a *kamaaina* at the end of three months. The qualifications for becoming an "old-timer" are many and diversified. Part of the gamut I had to run still gives me nightmares. My horse slipped and fell with me on a near-perpendicular trail, about three feet wide, with 1800 feet of nothing between the trail and the floor of the valley. But the real test came when the brown eyes of my two Hawaiian companions dared me to mount the quivering animal and complete the climb. Not satisfied, they invited me to kill my first wild boar by the simple method of dropping to the back of the animal, while it was held at bay by the dogs, and sticking a knife into its throat. (I have the lower jaw and tusks of that "baby"!)

Incidentally, if I'm ever stuck in answering a query (and don't think I don't expect to be!) I have contacts in the Islands who should be able to help supply additional information. Among them is Dr. Roy Finch, Chief Volcanologist at the Hawaii Volcano Observatory.

And speaking of volcanology, I've been in a dither, since rereading "A Pig for Mauna Loa." The reason is I'm afraid some discerning reader is going to ask "How come, Kunz, you didn't mention a thing about all that ash that falls during an eruption?" So, I've prepared an answer. I shall answer a question by asking a question—"Who the hell cares about the rain during a hurricane?"

By the way, I've been enjoying Carl Lane's "Prairie Paddles." You see, I learned to swim in the Monongahela River by diving off the texas deck of the old *Pacific*, one of the old packets. Also did a stint as river reporter for a weekly until I took a riverman's word and reported that the *William Whigham* cleared the Elizabeth Locks with one barge of "maiden-heads." I should have known that he was referring to "bollards!" And I've spent quite some time along the Big Muddy's banks and used to spot moonshine stills, from a Coast Guard plane, for the revenue—the ATU.

Incidentally, Mr. Kunz is a nephew of George A. Zerr who has been our *Ask Adventure* expert on the Ohio and Mississippi Rivers for so many years. We're glad to collaborate in such nepotism and welcome another member of the family to our fireside—K.S.W.

THE TRAIL AHEAD

After five long years of fighting the lobsterbacks in the line, young Jonathon Truscott, major attached to General Washington's staff, wondered why he had ever abandoned the sea. Now he had a chance to get back to salt water again—as Admiral de Grasse's pilot aboard His Most Christian Majesty Louis XVI's thirty-six-gun frigate *Amitié*—but he could summon up no enthusiasm for the voyage. Jonathan had scant faith in his French allies for Louis' *Marine* was notoriously reluctant to engage the British fleet. Well, maybe he could do something to persuade them to fight—or better still, as pilot, put the fleur-de-lis armada in a spot where the command would have to be "Clear for action!" . . . The author of many memorable sea stories which have appeared in these pages gives us next month another stirring tale of naval warfare when our country was young. You can't afford to miss—

"GUNPOWDER AND GLORY"

By R. W. DALY

And Coleman Meyer, with his throttle-foot on the floor and all six burners lit for a "Time Trial," rolls us around the track after the richest purse in racing history in another gripping story of the motor speedways. . . . Jim Kjelgaard, in "The Buck at Cross Lake," takes us on a deer hunt to Wisconsin in a fine tale of the northwoods. . . . Franklin Gregory calls another session of the Blue Pencil Club and takes us on a "Rugged Journey" to Samarkand on the trail of urial wool from the Hindu Kush. . . . Steve Frazee in "First Freeze," tells a gripping yarn of a mountain claim-jumper whose loot-scheme was foiled by his victim's weather-savvy. . . . C. Hall Thompson, in "Dynamite Detour," gives us a thrilling story of the men who roll the transcontinental trucks over the mountain highways on high-explosive detours. . . . W. B. Cameron takes us back to the early days of the R.C.M.P. when Charles Dickens' son was an Indian-fighting trooper on the northern plains in a fascinating article about the redcoat police. . . . Plus the next stirring instalment of Georges Surdez' great new serial, "Restricted!" . . . . A fine sea story by Albert Richard Wetjen. . . . And the usual quota of informative features and departments you can find each month only in—

ON SALE DECEMBER 10TH

ASK ADVENTURE

Information You Can't Get Elsewhere

SEAFARING lancers.

Query:—A friend who is going into commercial fishing next spring has offered me a partnership. Knowing little about the business naturally I have some pressing questions.

The boat is to be a converted Army Air-Sea Rescue craft, 104 foot overall, 22-foot beam, and 6-foot draft. The swordfish is what we are most interested in catching. Our base of operations would be Staten Island.

Is this boat satisfactory for commercial work? To what extent will it have to be converted?

What and where is the market for these fish? How long is the season? Where are the fishing grounds?

What is the average income of men (i.e. owners) in this field?

What methods are used in taking swordfish? What equipment is necessary?

The man who would be my partner was stationed in an Air-Sea Rescue Squadron and served as a first mate on this type of boat for two and a half years. My own experience has had nothing to do with commercial fishing although I am an ardent amateur deep-sea fisherman and my duties gave me some knowledge of navigation. Would you advise us to go into this venture together?

—Douglas Dougan,
721 Willow Ave.,
Hoboken, N. J.

Reply by C. Blackburn Miller:—The Air-Sea Rescue boat would, in all probability, prove adequate for the commercial fishing that you contemplate. She is considerably longer than most of the vessels employed in swordfishing, but I should not think that would prove a detriment.

Her conversion should not present any great problem as the requirements for swordfishing are by no means complex. They require a pulpit on the bow, reaching over the water from where the harpoons are thrown. Ropes run from the harpoons or "irons" to water-tight kegs which are thrown overboard as soon as the fish is struck.

An electrically controlled boom or derrick is necessary to lift the fish onto the deck, and there should be a refrigeration system installed to keep your catch. The craft which you mention may have such a system.

Boston is probably the best market for swordfish, though New York is a close second.

The best and most adjacent fishing grounds are off Montauk and Block Island, though those of Nova Scotia are superior in the quantity of fish taken.

The season is the summer months, as the fish come up the coast generally in early June.

It is impossible to state what the average income of men in the swordfishing field is, for the reason that it all depends upon the number of fish taken and the market price. This fluctuates to a considerable extent depending upon the supply of fish.

I should imagine that the experience that your prospective partner has derived from his association with that type of boat would recommend him as a valuable man in the line of work which you contemplate.

LODGEPOLE seeds and jack—Norway Austrian, Scotch, etc.

Query:—I'm interested in finding out when and how you get seeds from pine cones. We have a lot of pines but so far don't know how to extract the seeds. If you could inform me, I would be very grateful.

—Mrs. Edward Norton,
1065 N. Main St.,
Jamestown, N. Y.

Reply by A. H. Carhart:—Most pines will open in the cones in moderate temperature. There are two that generally have to have artificial heat applied to get the bracts of the cones to spread and allow the seeds to come out. These are the jack pine of the east and its close relative of the west, the lodgepole pine. They are the ones that seed so abundantly after a forest fire. The fire actually heats the cones enough to open them.

The other pines, such as white, yellow, Norway, Scotch and Austrian pines, will have the seeds in the cones in late summer and autumn. They should be gathered before the cones spread out for then the seeds will flutter out. The cones can be put in a tray or in something like an old sugar sack, and hung in an attic, or in a storage shed, for instance,

and a lot of the papery seed will sift out on its own volition. Shaking the sack or tray will get other seeds out. A moderately warm location, such as an attic, will hasten the process. It is pretty simple, but get the cones a little time before they are open and you'll be able to collect the seed by these methods.

THAT 1913 nickel again!

Query:—I have a 1913 Liberty Head nickel. Several people have seen it and declare that it is genuine. Can you tell me what it is worth?

—Mrs. Walter Lloyd,
Gormley R.R. No. 1,
Ontario, Can.

Reply by William L. Clark:—There were only six 1913 Liberty Head nickels made, and the whereabouts of these is known. It is absolutely impossible that you have a genuine specimen of this date. There have been a certain number of coins with altered dates which have turned up, purporting to be genuine 1913's. These are made either by replacing the zero in a 1903 with a one, or by recutting the 2 in a 1912. There have been several other cases of worn 1912's where the top loop of the 2 is visible and the bottom is worn off, and wishful thinking has seen a 1913 which does not exist. There have been others who have turned up with the 1913 Indian Head, Buffalo nickel dated 1913, thinking that they had the rare specimen. I do not know exactly what you have, but I am sure that your case must fit one of those described above.

HOW to tell gold when you see it.

Query:—How do you test rocks with gold flecks in them to determine whether it is really gold or mica? I found some small quartz rocks on a farm we just purchased and they have gold spots in them about ¼" in size. However, they appear too shiny.

—W. M. Williams, Jr.,
Rt. 5, Box 572,
Mt. Vernon, Wash.

Reply by Victor Shaw:—All you need to test raw gold in its native state is a pocket knife, or a hammer, or if you have it, a drop of nitric acid. But a steel knife blade is enough. Just jab its point into what you think may be gold—if it is gold, it will feel just as if you'd dug into a piece of lead pipe, softish and just making a dent in it.

But if the sample is yellow mica, or iron pyrites, it will crumple into a gray dust, and you'll thus know positively that it isn't gold. If you use the acid test: no single acid has any effect whatever upon gold; but most other substances fume instantly. You can hammer gold out flat, but other minerals crumble.

The minerals most frequently mistaken for gold include yellow mica (pholgopite), pyrites (sulphide of iron), or possibly also the copper sulphide called "chalcopyrite". The amber mica often is mistaken for gold when noticed in the sand beds of creeks, for it then closely resembles tiny flecks of gold. However, all micas are in flat plates or leaves, and usually you can separate these at an edge by careful poking with a knife point.

Mt. Vernon is in Skagit Co., south of Sedro-Woolley, and I'll mention that a little gold *has* been found on the upper Sauk River east from you in the vicinity of Darington, and upriver from that village. Using a gold-pan, you *might* still pan a few colors.

HOMMES—O, *bouvillons—32.*

Query:—1.—How many cattle or livestock are generally loaded in a stock car? 2.—Just how far can livestock be shipped before they are watered and fed? 3.—What is the principal market they are shipped to, Omaha, Kansas City, or Chicago?

—Henry N. Kaen,
Box 244,
De Kalb, Ill.

Reply by C. C. Anderson:—1). Usually the average number of cattle placed in a stock car is 32 head. It will vary of course with the size of the cattle, but the average weight of stuff shipped is about 1,000 pounds which would make the car loaded to about 15 tons.

2). Cattle can be in transit no more than 36 hours in most Western states, including Arizona, before they must be unloaded, fed, watered and rested. There is a legal waiver that can be agreed upon between the shipper and the railroad which will prolong this period, but it is seldom invoked. In fact most stockmen think 18 hours is a maximum length of time to keep stock in a car, but it is impractical out here because of our great distances and the fact that any market outside of Arizona is a terminal market at Chicago, Omaha, Kansas City, or Los Angeles. Due to the geographical difficulties, the Grand Canyon and the Colorado River to be exact, hardly any Arizona stock is shipped to Denver, Salt Lake or San Francisco.

The principal markets used by Arizona livestock men are Los Angeles, Omaha or Chicago. I would say—this is a guess—that over 75 per cent of our stock goes to the west coast market, it's shorter and faster and they always get a good price. Very few shipments are made east and then only for some particular reason. Cudahy Packing Company recently bought the pioneer packing plant in Arizona, at Phoenix, and while I haven't any exact figures as to the number of stock that is shipped to Phoenix it is considerable.

FUEL, stockades, and market baskets.

Query:—I am preparing an article on the cottonwood's contribution to the American way of life, and wondered if you'd help me out on a few points.

(1) What uses has this group of trees?

(2) Is it protected by the U. S. Forest Service in places?

(3) Is there extensive sawmilling of the trees?

(4) In our history, what part would you say it played?

Any other points you care to discuss will be deeply appreciated.

—Ferris M. Weddle,
Route 1,
Boise, Idaho

Reply by A. H. Carhart:—Answering your No. 4 question first: The cottonwood was a first aid to those who traveled up the rivers as they crossed the plains. Fuel. (See "Prairie Paddles," Ed.) Later it was used as cabins and stockades were built.

In my own recollection, back in western Iowa, there were many little sawmills that cut cottonwood logs into dimension lumber for farm structures. The outside had to be some other wood, but the skeletons of the houses and barns were cottonwood in many, many cases. That picture holds true of every section of the plains area. Even now there is quite a bit of sawing of cottonwood along the Missouri for dimension stuff.

Beyond this, a lot of use was made of this wood in sawing box and crate material during the war. There normally is much of such use. In Denver there is a plant which takes sections of cottonwood log, puts them in a turning device and shaves off thin sheets. These are then cut in strips about 2" wide, and woven into the ordinary "market basket."

I believe that gives some answers to your first and third questions. The tree is protected in the forest no more, nor less than other trees of its class.

If you will write the Forest Products Laboratory at Madison, Wis., they can give you a more complete listing of all the uses the cottonwood might be put to.

TO IMPROVE a horse's neck-reining.

Query:—I bought a horse about a year ago and learned to ride. Now that I can ride fairly well, I would like to teach my horse to neck-rein better. While going at a trot or slow gallop, he minds pretty well, but when he is running, you might as well try to turn a brick wall. I would like to have you tell me how to make him obey or where I can get information on training him.

—Richard Snyder,
R. D. No. 1,
Johnstown, N. Y.

Reply by John Richard Young:—As a beginner, you should not do any running at all. Instead you should try to make your horse go *collectedly*, in balance, at all paces. To improve your horse's neck-reining, try the following suggestions:

1. Ride him in a hackamore or a snaffle; not a curb bit.

2. If you have no hackamore and must use a snaffle, cross the reins under his neck. Thus, when you neck-rein him to the left, the rein that presses against the *right* side of his neck exerts pressure at the same time on the *left* side of his mouth. Sometimes this helps to teach a horse the turning idea.

3. In schooling him, use a stiff riding crop or a stiff smooth stick, such as the end of a broomstick, about 12 or 18 inches long, to tap him smartly (but not *hit* him hard) on the same side of the neck where the rein presses (the right side if you're reining him left and vice versa). This tapping will annoy him just enough to cause him to turn away from the stick—*and the moment he does so* STOP *tapping, instantly*. Teach him that by turning away from the stick he can relieve himself of the annoyance.

4. If possible, work him alongside a wall or a fence, always turning him *toward* the wall or fence. This helps to teach him to pivot on his hocks, swinging his forehand around his hindquarters.

5. Work him only at a walk until he turns perfectly. Then do it at a trot. Then work at a lope or canter.

6. Work him equally on both sides, unless he shows reluctance or clumsiness more on one side than the other. If he does, then work him *more* to that side.

7. When working at the canter be sure that you have him leading on the side to which you will turn him. Don't start him on the left lead and then ask him to neck-rein to the right.

8. Do not use a curb bit until he turns quickly and easily in the hackamore or snaffle.

9. Work him at least once a day. Twice a day is better. But do not make a lesson longer than 30 minutes at a time. Remember the tapping of the stick will leave his neck muscles slightly sore. Don't overdo it.

10. Be patient. Never lose your temper and be satisfied with a little progress at a time. And stop running your horse! That's only for racing or emergencies. A slow gallop is plenty fast enough for ordinary riding for one who rides only "fairly well" as you say is true of yourself.

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I would like to contact my buddy, Herbert C. Summers. We soldiered together with Co. C, 393rd Inf., 99 Div. I last saw him during the Battle of the Bulge, Dec. 16, 1944. His home is somewhere in Charleston, W. Virginia. Anyone knowing him please contact George O. Parker, 250 Columbia St., Cumberland, Md.

I would like to inquire about William Breese, Paul Dees, and Jakie Marlow with whom I served in the 12th Photo Section, France Field, Canal Zone. Please contact James C. Long, San. Eng., N. J. State Hospital, Greystone Park, N. J.

I am trying to locate my buddy, Norman Proper. He was on the *S. S. Minotaur, S. S. Matonian,* and the *S. S. Esso Baytown.* His hometown is Denver, Colo., and he is 6′ 2″ tall, weighing about 165 lbs. He has brown hair. He was last heard of in Port Aransas, Texas. William Quinn, 3314 Waterloo Place, Dallas, Texas.

Anyone knowing the whereabouts of Arthur Micue or Matthews, please write N. F. Preo, 3000 S. Lawndale Ave., Chicago 23, Ill. He enlisted from Maine in the U. S. Army, served in Texas and Mexico with the cavalry against Villa about 1917-1918.

Anyone knowing the whereabouts of my son, Hercules McClain, veteran of World War I, last heard of at 519½ South Daley St., Los Angeles, Calif., engaged in landscape gardening at that time, 1932, please write to his brother, William D. Meeks, Apt. 1, 102 Palmetto Dr., Pasadena, 4, Calif.

Any person who was at Lamberts [illegible] Degaussing Station, E.Y.P.S., N.O.B., Norfolk, Virginia during the period from June 1944 to July 1945 for any length of time please communicate with Edward A. Steacy, (E.M. 3/c) 10 Hopson St., Utica, N. Y.

I want to express my appreciation for your help in putting me in touch with my buddies. One of them spotted the notice in LOST TRAILS. *Thanks a million—Ed. A. Steacy (E.M. 3/c), 27 Shepherd Pl., Utica, N. Y.*

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(Continued from page 89)

The skipper weighed the .45 in his open palm. His thumb moved out and slipped the safety catch. He spoke with cold menace. "If this thing starts talking, mister, you'll be the only one in cabin won't hear it." Suddenly he roared, "Your full name!"

"J-Joseph Livingstone Derwent—"

Then pen began to scratch, slowed down, stopped. "You say 'Joseph,' eh?" asked the skipper mildly, his eyes searching back over the paper.

"That's what he said!" snarled Tex. "You know, long for 'Joe.'"

Cap Ivorsen's pursed lips split into a grin. He turned and spoke sharply to old Nagakut, who shook his head in alarm; then seizing the girl he dragged her out into the companionway and slammed the door. The skipper rose and clapped his horny hands on Derwent's shoulders.

"My frien'," he said, "you are so lucky you make me to feel so good. And I feel so good I must tell you little trick I pull on your frien's. When you go 'way they think you take key to w'isky by mistake. But no, here is key I have in my pocket all time." He fished out the key and handed it to Derwent. "Now you boys save a drink for me when I come back after getting up anchor, eh?" At the door he turned. "These Eskimos so very superstitious," he informed us, "that they no let boy and girl with even one name in common to marry. . ."

After the skipper had gone topside, Tex sat swirling a double-Scotch-and-t.w. in pensive silence. Finally he looked across his glass at Derwent.

"Did anybody besides the skipper ever tell you, Joe, that you're a lucky joe?"

Derwent's cherubic face wreathed in a wide grin.

"Oh, I wouldn't say that. It is very unscientific to trust to luck, you know. After all, I was pretty well briefed on Eskimo superstitions before I left California—the books by Arctic explorers are full of it." The grin faded and he looked serious. "And please don't call me Joe. It really isn't my Christian name."

"But—"

"A mere slip of the tongue. I was christened Justinian. But fellows, just call me J. Livingstone Derwent, III, for short, will you?"

THE END

(Continued from page 125)

It was brilliant only in that nobody else had thought of it before. Chen weighed the matter until the 2nd Battalion started, then nodded. "Good. Use it."

The major mentioned the carts and mules. There was a baggage train of fifteen carts and an ammunition train of eight. "They could follow the river. This slope will laugh at them."

Chen had a stubbornness which covered a lack of confidence in himself. He had potentialities, he could have been a competent officer. But he was not and he knew it. So he acted like a he-shrew when anyone tried to reason with him, and turned away. That's what he did now.

I looked at the major and found him already looking at me. We didn't like each other, but now there was a bond between us, for the moment. His piggy eyes jumped to Chen, and I knew what he was thinking. It wasn't pleasant.

The 2nd Battalion, best of the three, was having better going. The big Hunnanese pulled themselves up like eels. They were faster, too. Soon, only the 3rd Battalion was left on the beach. Chen ordered its commander to destroy the rafts. "Stack the wood. Don't throw it in the river." He eyed the baggage and ammunition trains, then slid his glance to the major.

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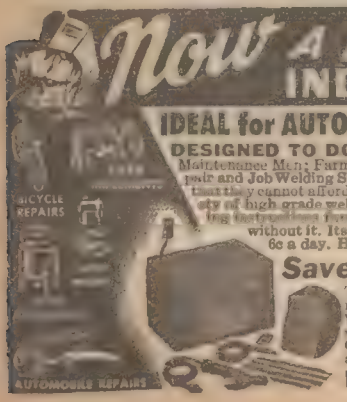

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"Hu Adjutant, you will command the rear echelon. Report to me when you reach the top." He wheeled and reached for a handhold, worked up leverage and sprang into the mists. His legs kicked once, his left knee rose and caught, and he was gone.

It was neatly characteristic, that withdrawal. Having at last seen the futility of getting the carts up the slope, he had passed the responsibility to Hu without appearing to back down from his original order. He knew what the major would do of course, and was prepared to overlook it for the sake of face.

Hu disobeyed orders quickly. He told the nurses to stay on the baggage carts, then detailed one company from the 3rd Battalion to march as escort. "Four miles down," he instructed the captain, "then turn left into low country. Turn left again, turn west, march back four miles. Understood?"

"Understood."

"Depart."

He never touched the weapons. They remained on the carts with the ammunition. He swept his arm out, palm upward, and bowed. "Invite."

"You first."

"Invite."

Considering that he would have liked to push Chen into the river, I wanted him to go first.

I bowed. "Invite you first."

"Invite."

The carts were grating past behind us and soon we'd be alone in the gorge, two hateful, bowing cowards, each afraid of the other. It was an annoying impasse.

It was the Mongol who saved us. She called from her perch on the cart: "Ride with us, Hu Adjutant. That outside-country-person needs no help."

The major bowed again, turned stiffly, and scrambled onto the moving cart. I saluted him, he saluted back, and I was left alone in the gorge with my face.

It was dawn before we met again on the slopes where the bivouac lay, and we smiled at each other. Everyone seemed to feel better that day, although the worst was ahead.

The reason lay behind us, lay in the gorge, deep and swift. The Long Death had been licked.

THE END

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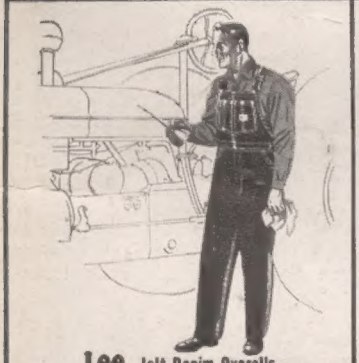

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